MARCH
10th
1926
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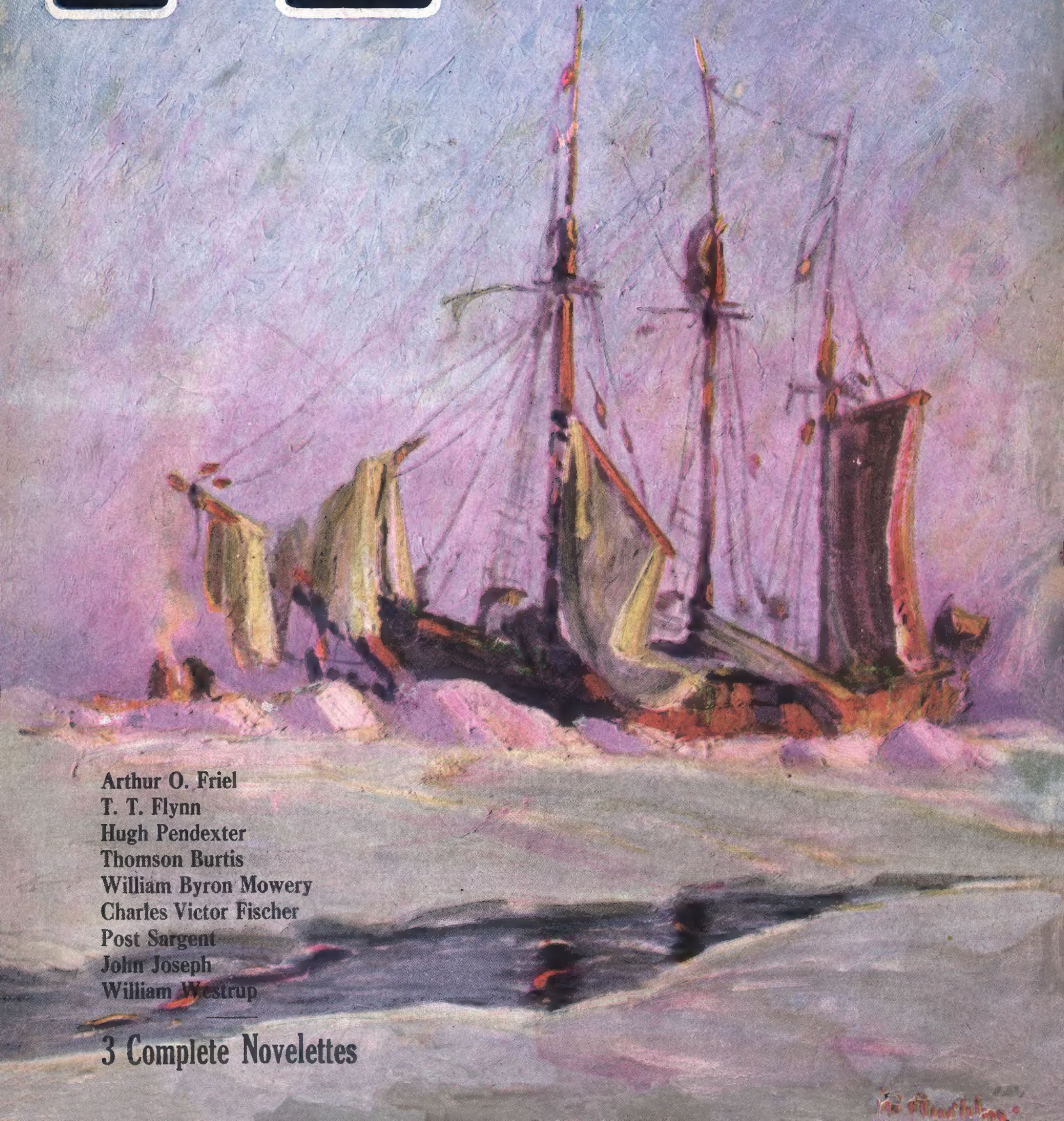
PUBLISHED
THREE TIMES A MONTH

Adventure



Arthur O. Friel
T. T. Flynn
Hugh Pendexter
Thomson Burtis
William Byron Mowery
Charles Victor Fischer
Post Sargent
John Joseph
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3 Complete Novelettes

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VOL. LVII No. 4

MARCH 10 · 1926

Adventure

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Published Three Times a Month by THE RIDGWAY COMPANY

J. H. GANNON, President — C. H. HOLMES, Secretary and Treasurer

Spring and Macdougal Streets - - New York, N. Y.
6, Henrietta St., Covent Garden, London, W. C., England

Entered as Second-Class Matter, October 1, 1910, at the Post-Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

Yearly Subscription, $6.00 in advance — **Single Copy, Twenty-Five Cents**

Foreign postage, $3.00 additional. Canadian postage, 90 cents.

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Contents for March 10th, 1926, Issue

Gray *A Complete Novelette* . . . . **Arthur O. Friel** 3
Amazon—big medicine for *Black White.*

The Taming of Bill McHarg . . . . **John Joseph** 53
West—the kid had a good memory.

Decorum and Decoration *Indian Code* . . . . . **Alanson Skinner** 61

The Admirable Crichton . . . . **Post Sargent** 62
Mantua—a paragon of the Middle Ages.

Equipment For Troops Ordered Overseas *Battle Regalia* . **Leonard H. Nason** 66

The Constable of Coyote Creek *A Complete Novelette* . . . **William Byron Mowery** 67
Northwest—he played a lone hand.

Between Gentlemen . . . . **Charles Victor Fischer** 86
Yellow Sea—"Ah'm playin' close to mah belly," said *Static.*

Three Marginal Notes *Medieval Documents* . . . . **F. R. Buckley** 96

Log Cabin Men *A Five-Part Story Part II* . . . . . **Hugh Pendexter** 97
New England—*Hoped-For* played the bagpipes.

**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

(*Continued on next page*)

(Continued from preceding page)

Pop . . . . **T. T. Flynn** 131
Railroad—the old man was not ready to quit.

Sands of Solitude . . . . **William Westrup** 143
Africa—the Hottentot cornered the water supply.

Tolley Tells Himself *A Complete Novelette* . . . . . **Thomson Burtis** 152
Air—the aviator was too clever.

Wampum *Red Money* . . . . **Raymond W. Thorp** 174

The Camp-Fire **A free-to-all meeting-place for readers, writers and adventurers** 175

Lost Trails 182

Various Practical Services Free to Any Reader 182

Ask Adventure 183
A free question and answer service bureau of information on outdoor life and activities everywhere. Comprising seventy geographical sub-divisions, with special sections on Radio, Mining and Prospecting, Weapons, Fishing, Forestry, Aviation, Army Matters, North American Anthropology, Health on the Trail, Railroading, Herpetology and Entomology.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung 191

The Trail Ahead 192

Headings . . . . **Geo. M. Richards**

Cover Design . . . . **H. L. Murphy**

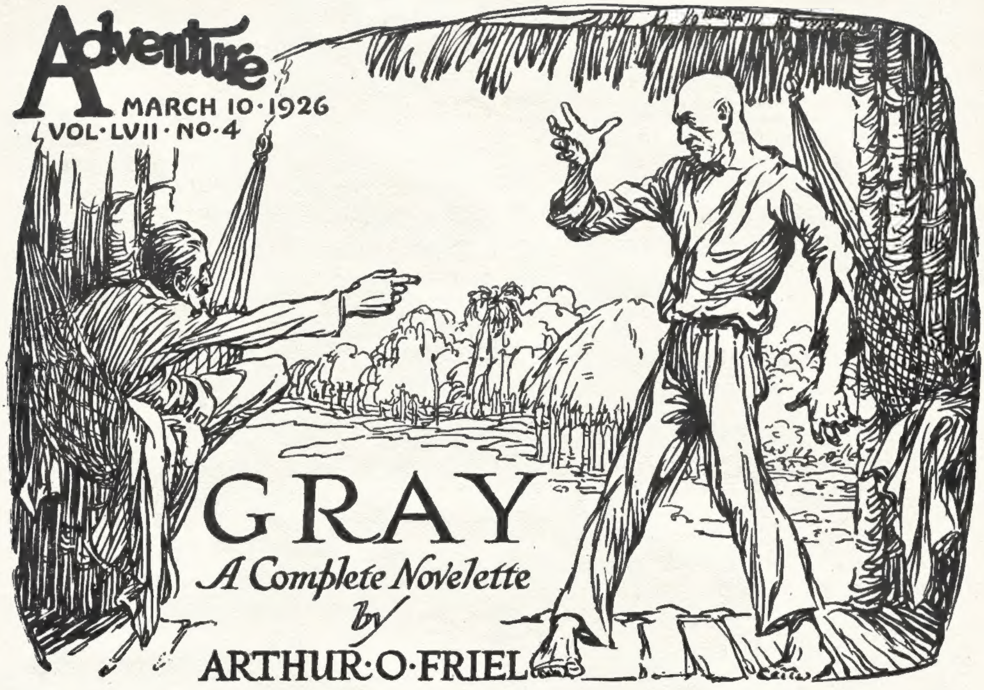
Three Complete Novelettes

BLACK MIKE'S wounds had the essence of hell-fire in them; or possibly the quintessence. Yes, he spoke English well. He had been to Oxford. "THE WITCH OF SARNOSO" is a complete novelette of the Florida coast by John Dorman, in the next issue.

PETE was one hunkie that they never monkeyed with, for rumor credited him with too black a past. "THE SQUEEZE," a novelette by W. Ryerson Johnson, will appear complete in the next issue.

"IT IS a sign, *Bwani*. The little one shall be a great hunter—greater than any the Forest of Always Night has yet produced." "TORO OF THE LITTLE PEOPLE," a complete novelette by Leo Walmsley, will appear in the next issue.

Adventure
MARCH 10·1926
VOL·LVII·NO·4



GRAY

A Complete Novelette

by

ARTHUR·O·FRIEL

Author of "Black White," "Tiger River," etc.

PARDON me, señor. I do not wish to intrude; but you bear such a marvelous resemblance to a gentleman whom I met here before—

Válgame Dios! It is you, in truth! The Señor Seabury—the North American who went to hunt gold on the Rio Caroni! *Ajo!* I knew it was you, and yet I knew it could not be, and I have sat these five minutes staring at you. It is not often that, in this Venezuela of ours, a dead man returns to life.

Cómo? But yes, *amigo*, you have been dead for—ah—three years, yes? It was in 1922, I am sure, when you and your partner, the Señor Davis, left this Ciudad Bolívar to seek your fortunes on that harsh river. Yes, three years. And ever since the heavy rains of that year came and went, men have said you were dead. The fever—

Oh, I see. It was the Señor Davis who died? And you went with Indians, you say, from the Caroní to the Cuyuni, and so into British Guiana, and from there back to the States. Yes, I comprehend. *Bien.* I am most heartily glad that you lived to get out. Many men who have gone up into that gold country have not been so fortunate. And now you mean to try again in the same place? May luck go with you! You will need it.

Yes, yes, you have it right. I am that same Loco León, who was here with you and Señor Davis three years ago; Loco León, the Mad Lion of the unknown mountains of Guayana, who gathers the balata rubber with the aid of the Maquiritare Indians. I am just ending my yearly holiday here, after bringing my usual cargoes down the Orinoco; but I still have my thirst for the good rum of Maracaibo, and if you will permit me— *Muchacho!* Fetch over here my bottle, and bring clean glasses. Three glasses, boy—*tres!* Now let us turn down one glass, so, in honor of the good fellow who drank with us and is dead. And to you, señor, *salud!*

Ah, it tastes like old times. And to me it seems only yesterday that we three sat here, where now are only two. I remember how we smoked and drank and talked, and how Señor Davis kept making little circles on the table with the bottom of his glass, and how interested he was in my tales of the wilds of Guayana and—

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Caramba! This is most strange! It comes to my mind that on those evenings I told you the stories of Black White and his Thirty Gang. And now you come back from the dead just in time to hear— But no, I must not tell of that thing; at least, not now. No, *amigo;* I beg you to excuse me. There are reasons— But, well, since you insist so strongly, perhaps I will do so, after all. But only on one condition, friend: That you will promise not to repeat it, nor to give the slightest hint that you know it, so long as you remain in Venezuela. When you were here before I noticed that you kept your word in all things. And, now that I think of it, I must tell it to you tonight if ever; for tomorrow night at this time I shall be gone, returning to my own wild lands, not to come out for another year. And it may be that I shall not come out at all. Death has snatched at me many a time, and perhaps at the next attempt he will not miss. Who knows but that this may be the last trip of Loco León?

I have your word? *Bien.* But before I begin, let your eyes drift toward that corner over yonder, where is a man sitting alone, his back to the wall. If he is not looking this way, study him a moment. You see him? A tall, wide-shouldered, bearded man with gray hair and strongly marked features. Still as a statue, is he not? And with no more change of expression. I have seen him sit so for hours, only his eyes moving at times. One can no more read his thoughts than one can see through that *adobe* wall. Neither can any one draw him in to talk. He is the Señor Gray, an American, who is said to have come north from Brazil, and who is leaving tomorrow for the States. That is all that is known about him, and not all of that may be true. How old do you judge him to be?

Fifty? That is just what I have been thinking, that he looked to be of about that age. Yet he may be younger, or even older. It is not so much the years that age a man as the life he lives during those years. Is it not so? But, *válgame*, how I am rambling! I was to talk to you about Black White, not about Gray or Brown or Green or other colors. It must be that the drinks I took before I saw you have loosened my tongue at the wrong end. Let us see what one more will do to it. Ah! And now to my tale.

I

NOW it is quite likely that in the past three years you have forgotten much, if not all, of what I told you about Black White. So let me recall to your mind who he was and what he became.

A wealthy, handome young ——, son of the president of a big company in your United States, he came here both to investigate the tonca-bean resources of the Rio Cura and to have whatever fun he could. And, because of his good looks, the fun which came most easily to him was that of amours. Here in Bolívar and up in the wilderness it was the same; the prettiest girls, whether of proud Spanish family or of uncivilized Indian tribe, fell in to his hand like charmed birds. So he amused himself with each girl while she interested him, then cast her aside like a toy grown tiresome.

And then, far up in those mountains of Guayana where I work the balata in its season, he trifled once too often. The girl, as I told you long ago, was Juana, daughter of Juancito, chief of the Maquiritare tribe of Uaunana. And when she found that he was about to leave her she mixed the secret *yucut' 'sehi* drink of the ancient Caribs, which turns the skin of the drinker to a sooty black; and she gave it to him unawares, and in three days he became black from hair to heels. And the shock of finding himself with the skin of a negro cracked his brain, turning him into a madman who swore that no white man should ever see his face and live to tell of it.

So he has remained up there among those grim mountains and fierce rivers and poison-using Indians, roaming like a *tigre* wherever his wild moods prompted him to go. And wherever he has gone, there has gone Juana, his woman; the handsomest Indian woman I have ever seen, yet hardly more to him than a faithful dog. His mind, blackened like his body, has lusted, not for women but for war. And, by sending men of the Maquiritares with gold to trade for rifles and cartridges of thirty caliber, he formed and armed and trained that band of *guerreros* called the "Thirty Gang." And with these he has destroyed all slave-hunting whites who dared to raid in the land of the Maquiritares, and has fought the Guaharibos and other savages of the region round about.

A wild, active life, this, full of adventure and daring; yet one which brought him little joy. In truth, it has been but the existence of a black *tigre*, ever goaded by hunger into restless prowling and deeds of blood. Yes, it was worse than that; for the hunger of a real *tigre* is only that of the belly, and when he has eaten his kill he is content for a time; but this man's craving was for the things he had lost and never could find again—the things of his own native land, which his blackness and his bitterness would prevent him from enjoying even if he should return to that land. All his roaming and fighting have brought him only fatigue of body, not rest of mind; and from time to time his desire for the companionship of a white man has driven him to me.

More than once he has come to some night camp of mine, when I was roving among his hills, and, standing in the blackness where I could not see him, has commanded me to talk English to him. It did not matter what I said, so long as I said it in the language to which he was born. He has stood so for hours, a cocked gun in his hands, while I talked at random about anything that came to mind. At the end I would either find that he had silently withdrawn and left me speaking to the empty dark, or I would hear him go away with a weird laugh and a wild yell:

"Dead! Dead! A dead man walking in the night! Black! Black! Black as the soot of ——! Yah-hah-hee-hee-hah!"

So it has gone on for nine years. Nine long years that one has been a dead man, as he said; dead to the world that had known him; dead to all but the girl who had made him so, and the people of her nation, and Loco León, the one white friend of that nation. And now, in this ninth year, he has become dead to us also. Yes, it is true. Black White has passed forever from the sight of all men. And this story which I tell you tonight has to do with his passing.

It was not more than three months ago when this thing came about. As you will remember, I have long worked the balata trees in the wild land along the Rio Ventuari, which flows in to the upper Orinoco about seven hundred miles above this city. There I have my *sitio*, and there, in the dry time, I ramble about to find new rubber districts and to visit the tribe-houses of my Indian friends. There, too, the Maquiritares come to my chosen forest when the rains begin, and from June through October we all are busy cutting the trees, boiling the bark-sap, and storing the finished blocks of pure balata in huts to wait for shipment. And there, in October of this year, I was making my plans for the bringing out of these blocks from the *caños* where we had worked to the main river, and for the payment of the workers in the trade goods they like, when a word reached me that made me pause.

Juana, the woman of Black White, was dying.

The news struck me like a blow. Long accustomed though I have been to the various deaths of those harsh highlands—often sudden and violent—the unexpectedness of this thing made it a shock. For Juana was not the woman to die easily, or even to fall sick. Indeed, she was even more strong, healthy, shapely and handsome now, nine years after taking her man, than she had been as a maiden. Although that man of hers kept himself always hidden from my eye, she herself had come more than once within my sight. Twice in the last dry time she had walked calmly up to my campfire and stood there while I talked to her unseen companion, and I had marveled as I noted how fresh and vigorous she looked, without a trace of age. Not that she was old, as years go; not more than twenty-six at most. Yet at twenty-six the Indian woman of our hot land is likely to be losing her looks, especially if mated. Often, in truth, she is toothless and haggard.

Yet, as I thought about this afterward, I could see reasons why Juana should remain unworn by the passage of time. For the things that age a woman usually are work or weakness or unhappiness, the care of children, or starvation of love. And Juana, so far as I know, had none of these. Daughter of a chief, she did no work unless she chose, and whatever toil she undertook for her man would be a pleasure. Shorter than her mate by more than a head, yet she was strongly framed, well muscled, able to travel long distances or carry heavy burdens without fatigue; her clear tan skin and her big brown eyes were always glowing with health. Above all, she was happy. She had made this man her own, stained him so that he could neither go from her nor attract other girls; and, though he was harsh and unfeeling toward other men, I have never heard of his acting cruelly toward her. Without doubt she knew all the changes of his temper and how to adapt herself to them. And quite likely there were times when his mood softened and he gave her a tigerish sort of love. At any rate, she was content with him.

So, with mind untroubled and body unweakened, there was little reason for her to grow older. And there was no reason at all for her to be dying now, unless through violence or accident. Yet the report which came to me was that she was wasting away from a strange sickness, a sort of fever which left her a little weaker every day, and which the medicine men of her people could not overcome.

NOW that word "fever" may mean anything or nothing in the Alto Orinoco country. There is the real fever of the forest, which may make you a little sick, or very sick, or dead between sunrise and sunset. In truth, I have seen a man strong and active at noon and a corpse at night. Then there is the fever of the sun, which will lay you down for a day or two with a head full of agony. And sometimes—though very seldom nowadays—comes the yellow fever; there is only one end to that.

But there are also sicknesses which people call "*fiebre*" but which are not fever at all; they make you a little feverish, but your heat and headache are only a part of the ailment, not the cause of it. More than once I have seen a peon take to his hammock, moaning that he had the wicked fever, when he was suffering only from eating too greedily while overheated. So this "fever" of Juana's might not be fever at all. And at first I found it hard to believe that she could even be sick.

It was Frasco, one of the Maquiritares who live always at my *sitio*, who brought me the news; and he said he had heard it from the workers out in the forest, who in turn had gotten it from a roaming party of young men, now gone on their way. He could tell me nothing more. I was rather vexed because the bringers of that word had not come to my hut—a temporary camp at the port of the largest district we were working—to talk to me in person, as visiting Indians usually do. But it was useless to send after them now, for they had passed through the farthest end of my workings, and it had taken hours for their report to trickle through the dense woods to me. So, after smoking a cigaret and telling myself several times that this thing could not be true, I ordered Frasco to follow the rumor back through the district until he reached the men who had first heard it; and, if he found that the story had not become twisted in passing through so many mouths, to bring one of those men to me. He went out into the rain-soaked tangle of tree and bush and vine, and I tried to force my mind back into the tangle of payments and transport plans on the little table before me. After a time, though, I had to give it up.

Whether I would or not, I had to believe that Juana was ill. That was the main fact of the report, and it was unlikely to have been changed in the telling, even if the rest of it were untrue. Suppose she should die—what then? It would cause me no great grief, for I had never cared for her. In fact, I felt somewhat unfriendly toward her.

There had been a certain Maquiritare maiden who fancied me, and Juana had coolly advised her to give me the secret drink which would turn me black and make me her man; and you may be sure that when I learned of this advice it did not increase my liking for the advisor. But I could realize that her death would make a vast difference to her mad mate. And, since it is a habit of mine to look always a little ahead of the present moment, I tried now to see the result of her passing out of the life of Black White.

The farther into the future I looked, the more concerned I became. Up to this time I had thought her hardly more important to him than his shadow. But now I realized that, through being constantly by him for all these years, she had become as much a part of him as his own right hand. And, just as you and I think little of our right hands as long as they perform our wills, but would be woefully crippled if they were suddenly cut off, so this man would be grievously maimed in mind by losing her. She had been a sane part of his being, partly balancing his insanity, and, to some extent, controlling it. When she went no sanity or control would be left. His cracked brain would break still further; and, fierce as he now was, he would become utterly savage. And then one of two things would come about; he would be killed by his Indians in self-defense, or he would lead his *guerreros* in horrible raids of murder against peaceful settlements in the Orinoco valley.

Thinking still farther along this same line, I saw that if he should take that bloody trail his first victim probably would be I, Loco León. I was nearer to him than any other civilized man, and thus the easiest to reach. And I have heard that when crazed men become murderous maniacs they turn first on their best friends. So, though he and I had each saved the life of the other in years past, we now should be shooting on sight. One of us, perhaps both of us, and our men as well, must perish, if what I foresaw should prove true.

That being so, it was vitally necessary for me to take some action to prevent this thing from coming about. Before I could decide on that action, though, I must wait for Frasco to bring back his report.

Considering how far he had to go, that man of mine made his trip in very good time. It was not yet dark when he and another Indian came trotting into my little clearing, wet as water-dogs and breathing deep and fast. As he ducked in under the low roof of my hut he panted:

"*Es verdad*. It is true."

I looked at the other man—a young fellow with intelligent face—and asked him—

"Who gave you the word about Juana?"

He named four young bachelors of the tribe-house of Uaunana, the old home of Juana. They had passed through our forest, he said, on their way to visit and trade with the Yabaranos of the Rio Manapiare.

"And she is very sick?" I quizzed.

"She dies. Slow, day by day, she slips down."

"Fever?"

"They call it fever. A cool fever that rests on her like a great bat and sucks away her life."

"And the wise men cannot destroy this bat?"

"No."

"How long have they tried?"

"Since the last moon died. They say that when this moon goes into the dark she goes with it."

I figured on the moon. If this prophecy was correct she still had ten more days to live.

"She is at Uaunana?" I asked.

"At Uaunana."

"El Blanco Negro—her man—is he with her?"

"It is so."

"And what more do you know of this thing?"

"There is nothing more."

"*Bien,*" said I. "You may go."

He went. For awhile I sat looking out at the misty forest, now growing more dim with coming night. Then I told Frasco:

"Find Caraqueño and tell him to come here. Find Gil. You and Gil will make up food packs for a hard walk. Tomorrow at dawn we shall start for Uaunana."

II

THIS man Caraqueño, señor, is the only white man I keep by me. I found him starving on the shore of the Orinoco last year and took him with me to my Ventuari *sitio;* and there he has stayed. He is long and lank, and he has the widest and funniest grin that ever split a human face. But he has a sharp eye, a shrewd head, and a way of getting work out of Indians. So I have made him my chief foreman.

I knew Caraqueño would faithfully carry on all the regular work while I was gone, and other matters could wait until I should return. So, when he came in, I gave him his instructions. And the next morning I tramped away eastward with my two best Indians: Frasco and Gil. If the river had not been so bad I should have taken more men and journeyed in a curial. But the rains had not yet ceased, the Ventuari was ugly and powerful, and a voyage up against its fierce waters would be not only difficult and dangerous but very slow. So we traveled *por tierra*—by land.

We carried very little; some food, a couple of bows and a few arrows, my rifle and twenty cartridges, and two hammocks—one for me and one for the Indians, who often sleep together for warmth on wet nights. Matches and machetes also we had, of course. And in a small back-basket I bore the only medicines I owned; a little quinine, and two bottles of the Paludismo, which is a very good *remedio* for the malarial fever.

These cures I took with me because, as I say, they were the only ones I had. But I doubted that they would be of use to Juana, for I did not believe she had fever. What the young Indian had said about her sickness made me feel she was dying from one of two things. The first was beri-beri, which makes one waste away and grow very weak, becoming paralyzed and finally dying. The other was some slow poison.

In the same little basket with the bottles I carried my clothes, wrapped in a light rubber sheet. They were not very dry—nothing is really dry after months of jungle rain—but they were much less wet than they would be after a mile of walking through the woods; and I saw no sense in soaking them at the start. So, except for a sombrero, an Indian clout, and my alpargatas I wore nothing at all. Rain was falling as we started, and it kept coming for an hour or more. When it stopped for awhile the trees kept dripping, and we were spattered all the time until we came out of the woods into an open *sabana*.

It was a wide one, and we marched along at good speed, though not so fast as to tire ourselves too soon. The sky remained so thick that no sign of the sun could be seen, and, with nothing to give us our direction and small humpy hills all about, it would have been easy to lose our course; but those men of mine kept going as true as if on a *camino real*—a royal highway. And through all the days of our walking it was the same. Whether we were in the open, or buried in dense forest, or blocked by a deep *caño*, they knew always the way to continue on toward Uaunana. Those Maquiritares of the uplands, sons of the old Caribs whose war-trails once crossed all the Guayana country, have their own secret routes which, to the eye of a white man, are nothing.

So we passed over the bare space until we reached another belt of forest, and through the trees until we met a creek; and with our bush knives we made a small raft to hold our burdens, then swam with it to the other shore; and we kept on until we came into another *sabana*, crossed that to another forest and *caño*, and did as before. There was no danger in swimming those creeks, except the chance that one of us might be seized by some *culebra de agua*—the huge water-snake; and none of these attacked us. Nor did any of the poisonous bush snakes spring at us, although we met more than one. We kept steadily on. Now and then we killed some bird or beast and cooked it. At night we slung our hammocks under rain-roofs of braided leaves and slept as well as we might. At daybreak we ate whatever we had and resumed our way.

Rain poured hard at times, blinding us and battering us by day and drowning our fires at night. At other times the sun or moon shone bright and clear—but not for long. We were seldom dry or comfortable. Yet, after months of monotonous balata work, we found enjoyment in being once more on the move. In some ways, too, this passage was easier and safer than it would have been in the dry months. The cool, damp air made us more vigorous than we should have been under blazing sun. Meat was not hard to find, for overflowing creeks made little islands on which animals of the ground were caught. And we knew we should meet no Guaharibos or other marauding savages, for these always stay in their home lands during the wet months.

Then we left the *sabanas* behind us, reaching the rougher region where all is forest. Now our way became hard indeed, and at our night camps we were almost too tired to eat. But we cut and climbed and crawled our way through and over everything before us. And when we ended our march the dying moon and the dying Juana still had four days to live.

We reached the Caño Uaunana, which flowed past the big tribe-house of that name, late on a day of little rain. The bush along the stream was almost dry, and a misty sun was sending pale light from low in the west; but we met no men hunting, heard no sounds of people working, and, at the port, found the canoes untended. Gil swam across and brought one of the dugouts to me. On the other shore we all paused long enough to clean ourselves of bush-dirt, and then I put on my clothes. The Maquiritares are a clean people, and my men would have considered it very impolite to go dirty into the *paragua;* while I, their white *patrón,* owed it to them and to myself to appear as a white man should. When we followed the steep path up the hill and came out into the clearing we bore little trace of our toilsome trip, except that I had a beard a week old.

AS THE big cone-roofed house on the hilltop came into sight we looked sharply at the several small open-sided huts around it, thinking that we might find quartered there the fighting men of Black White; for we knew the *paragua* itself was occupied too fully to have room for these. But we saw no sign of warriors, nor of any one else except one man standing at the door nearest us. A little smoke was rising above the roof, but it seemed to come not from the smoke-hole in the palm thatch but from some spot just beyond the farther wall. Nothing else was to be seen, except the litter of bleached tree-trunks in the clearing and the dark jungle rising all around.

Along the winding path we picked our way, and so came to the summit of the slope. By the time we reached the house another man had come out. The pair looked very serious and held spears; an unusual thing, for the men of Uaunana usually meet me with a little smile and hands empty.

"What is this?" I demanded. "Why do you bring *lanzas* to Loco León?"

They glanced down at their weapons, then looked a little foolish; and I saw that they had not meant to greet me in such a manner, but must have been holding the spears and brought them unthinkingly. Without answer, one turned and went hastily back through the small entrance. It was the door of the women; but I knew he would slip through a bark flap in the inner partition and tell the other men, in the circular central room which no woman may enter, that I was here.

The other, also unspeaking, walked away toward the doorway regularly used by the men. We followed, entered, passed along the short corridor, and so came into the inner room. There burned a small fire, giving out almost no smoke; and there, in hammocks, on carved stools, or on their haunches, sat or squatted all the men of Uaunana except the chief. And near every man rested a weapon.

They looked at me without a word. I looked back at them, and saw that among them was no follower of Black White.

"What is this?" I repeated. "Why do the men of Uaunana huddle around a fire like old women? And why are these spears and clubs and machetes so ready?"

Still nobody spoke. Most of them could not speak Spanish, of course; but there were several who understood the language well enough, and these remained as dumb as the rest.

"Where is your chief?" I persisted, looking hard at one of those who, I knew, could speak my tongue.

For a minute it seemed that he would not answer. But then he replied—

"Near."

"Then let him be brought," I commanded. "What of Juana? She lives?"

This time the Spanish-speaking ones looked quickly at one another. Presently the same man answered—

"She lives."

His eyes were questioning me. And now I realized that none here understood why I had appeared so suddenly and unexpectedly among them, and that it was not their way to talk when puzzled. So I decided to make matters clear to all, instead of waiting for their *capitán*. Turning to Frasco, I said—

"Say this in your own language to the people of Uaunana:

"A word has come down the Ventuari to the ears of Loco León, the friend of the Maquiritares. The word was that Juana, the girl of Juancito and the woman of El Blanco Negro, lay sick at Uaunana; that upon her rested a great bat which drew her life from her; that even the wise men could not drive this evil bat away. And so, because Loco León has ever been the friend of the people of Uaunana and also of El Blanco Negro, he has left all his own affairs and walked long and hard through the rains to try to help Juana to live again. Six long days he has walked and swum and climbed, and five cold nights he has slept without a roof above his head. And now that he has come to the end of his march no man gives him welcome or a place by the fire."

At my last words there were several quick grunts. One was from Frasco, who was not well pleased by our cool reception. The others were from those who understood my Spanish. These now arose swiftly, making half a dozen places for me to sit. But I stood where I was until Frasco had repeated my talk in the Maquiritare dialect.

Then every man still sitting came to his feet, and a rumble went through the room. Sober faces lit up with gladness, and my little vexation at their slowness and dumbness left me. Their welcome was warm enough now. They grinned, and some pointed to their hammocks, while those who had stools picked them up and brought them forward. Two of these spoke low to Frasco, who in turn told me:

"They say they did not mean to be cold to Loco León. They say their hearts are low in their bellies and a chill is in their blood. They say the black white one is here, and as his woman grows weak his madness grows strong. At any time he may run about and kill. They can kill him, but if they do it his warriors will butcher all."

So this was why there was no cheer among these people and men went armed. The thing I had visioned was coming true.

"Where are his warriors?" I quickly asked.

Frasco and the other two muttered among themselves. Then he said:

"They do not know. But they think they are not far."

"*Bien.* Tell them to be of good heart," I encouraged, though I did not feel very hopeful. "Loco León will do what he can."

Frasco spoke this loudly, so that all might hear. And, in truth, many of them already looked relieved. At different times I have done things which gave those Indians considerable faith in my powers, and they now were remembering those things. As my words sank into their minds it seemed as if a damp depression lifted from the place and a comforting warmth crept in.

But a colder breath came after it. While Frasco and his friends had been talking among themselves, some man must have slipped out unnoticed and carried my speech to other ears. And now, as I stepped forward to take a seat and await the coming of the chief, I saw the faces before me tighten and the eyes slide toward the weapons at hand. At the same moment Frasco and Gil turned quickly, and behind me sounded a faint, swift tread. I swung about. And then, for a second, a chill crawled along my back.

From the outer door had come a gaunt black figure which was striding at me with a great claw-fingered paw raised as if about to tear out my throat. From its head hung long matted hair, and from its jaw a tangled black beard. Its mouth turned down at the corners, its lower teeth gleamed like the grin of a *tigre*, and its eyes glared red in the firelight. It was a thing which, nine years ago, had been a handsome, devil-may-care young man, but now was a creature of dread before which even the sons of the Caribs shrank. Black White!

III

AT ARM'S length from me the madman stopped. And for a long, breathless minute there was not the slightest sound in all that big *paragua*.

So astonished was I that I stood like a stone, without movement or understanding. I should as soon have expected to see the roof rise and fly away as to behold Black White stalking into the firelight and facing me. Although I had known he was near at hand, and had expected sooner or later to talk to him, it had not entered my head that I should see him; I knew too well his mania for remaining hidden. And the Indians, who for days had been dreading the moment when he should become blood-mad, now undoubtedly thought him about to attack me. So we all stood there mute and staring.

With that threatening hand still raised and fingers crooked, White poised as motionless as the rest of us. His lids, like his lips, were drawn down at the corners, and under them his bloodshot blue eyes glinted like blood-stained steel. In them the firelight flickered, and across his seamed, scarred face—seamed by bitterness, and scarred by long slashes left by his nails when, in some frenzy, he had tried to tear off his blackness—wavering shadows came and went. And, though his features did not move, it seemed that his expression kept changing; or, rather, that anger and grief were working within him and showing through those hard eyes. Somehow it came to me that he meant no harm to me, but that he was in torment.

My breath came back to me, and probably my own expression changed. I have always felt sorry for him, and may have shown it now. At any rate, although I said nothing for another minute or so, his half-clenched hand sank to his side, and he looked a little less savage.

"Good day, White," I said then, speaking quietly. "I hear that Juana is sick. So I have come to see what can be done for her. I have a little medicine—"

Before I could say more he broke out with a yell.

"Sick? Sick? Yah! Dead! Dead! Dead alive! Deader than I am! Murder—murder, León, poison! Yah! Poison! These dirty dogs—here! See 'em, these snakes! They're dead too! Three days—four days—moon dies—all die! I kill 'em all, men, women, kids, all murderers all die! —— 'em to ——! Arrrh!"

He snarled like a fighting dog, and his teeth snapped together. And through those teeth he hissed words which I did not know —Indian words—but which I easily understood to be curses and threats. Those words were for the men of Uaunana, and the face he turned on them was fearful to behold. In every line of it was the menace of death.

Mad ravings, I thought. And as soon as I saw my chance I stopped them.

"This will do no good, White," I told him, keeping calm. "We waste time. Where is Juana? Juana, I say! Take me to her."

"Juana? Dead, fool, dead! Dead of poison! Dead—"

"Let us go to her. Perhaps she will live again. *Vamos!*"

He glared again at the Indians, who had picked up their weapons and drawn together. Then, sudden as a striking snake, he shot both hands at me and yanked me nearly off my feet.

"Hurry up!" he growled. "What you waiting for? Come see Juana—poor dead Juana! Get a move on! Moon dying—every minute counts—"

And, mumbling and grumbling, he dragged me toward the door. Just in time I spoke sharply to Frasco and Gil, who, misunderstanding White's roughness, had put arrows to bowstrings. By a quick twist I then broke free, shoved White away from me, and snapped at him:

"Keep your hands off! And get out of the way! *Vaya!*"

It was not the wisest way to handle him, perhaps. But I do not allow any man, sane or insane, drunk or sober, to handle me violently, and I was a little angry. He snarled again, and for an instant it seemed that he would jump at me. But I walked straight on toward the door, giving him no further attention; and he followed close, not touching me again. So we went out into the last light of the day.

Outside he grunted and turned to the right. We passed along the curving wall and, half-way around, came to a small, palm-roofed and palm-sided hut. Its tiny door was closed. From a little roof-hole rose smoke—the same smoke I had noticed from the other side of the *paragua*. White pushed the door open, stooped, and went in. I followed.

The moment I was inside, the door swung shut. At once the place was very dim. Smoke was in the air, and my eyes stung. Then they cleared, and I saw three people besides my queer companion. In a hammock lay Juana. Beside her, on a low stool, sat her father, Juancito. Beyond, at a small fire where some sour-smelling herbs simmered in a clay pot, squatted a thin old man who watched me between narrow lids. It was he who, reaching one long arm, had shut the door so quickly behind me.

Dropping my rifle in a corner, I stepped at once to the hammock. And there, after one look, I stood feeling that I had come too late to do anything but gaze at the dead. Already the spirit of the woman who lay there seemed to have gone out into the dark. And as I gazed at her drawn face and shrunken form I marveled. Although men had said she was wasting away, I had not looked for such a change. Could this pitiful skeleton of a woman truly be the strong, shapely Juana who so long had roved the wild hills and streams with her wilder man?

Then I felt eyes upon me, and glanced up to meet the unwinking gaze of Juancito, the red regard of White, and the peering squint of the thin man. This last one I did not recognize, but I judged him to be a doctor. He and I looked steadily at each other a minute or two, and something prompted me to put a hand to Juana's heart. Weak and slow, but regular, it still beat.

Her skin was very cool, almost cold, and quite damp. If she had had fever, it was gone; and I felt more than ever convinced that her trouble had not been fever. And, whatever that trouble was, I knew I could do her no good. Certainly my fever medicines would be of no use; and I had no other. Nor did I believe that any other could cure her now. Though still living, she was in the slowly closing grip of Death.

Once again I looked at Juancito, and I shook my head.

"I brought cures for fever," I said. "But this is not fever."

The chief made no answer. His face set in a grim way, and he looked stonily back at his girl.

"How did the sickness begin?" I asked. "What do the wise men say of it?"

Juancito's expression became all the more hard. He held his silence. From White came a rumble, and rage began to show once more in his sooty visage. Then the squatting doctor spoke one short word.

"*Sal!*"

It was a demand. He still was peering through his smoke at me. Squinting back at him, I saw that his eyes were sharp as needles.

"*Sal?* Salt?" I repeated. "What do you mean?"

"*Sal!*" he snapped. Not another word would he say.

I stared at him, and at White, and at Juancito, and down once more at Juana. And rapidly I put things together and found a possible answer to the riddle.

THE Maquiritares, like all the other Indians of our Guayana, use for hunting with the blowgun, and sometimes for war, the poison called *curare;* that weird mixture which kills surely and quickly, yet leaves the flesh of bird or animal fit to eat. Among these Indians I have never heard of any way to counteract its deadly effect. Among white men, though, I have often heard it said that salt and sugar, melted in water and drunk at once, will save the life of a man stricken by it. This may be true, or it may not; I never have known one who was saved in this way. And even if it be true, no wounded Indian can cure himself with salt, because he never has salt. There is no salt in the country except that found in the the salt pans on the north coast; and, since its sale is a monopoly of the government, it can be obtained only through merchants permitted to sell it.

But now here was an Indian *médico* demanding salt from me, the only man in the region likely to have it. And Black White had just raved of poison. And, though I knew well enough that *curare* kills very speedily instead of allowing its victim to linger, it flashed through my mind that at the bottom of this queer illness was that same poison. And I spoke out my thought.

"*Curare!* Juana dies of the *curare!*"

Juancito's eyes lifted and hung once more on mine, and in them was an unpleasant glitter, as if my demand had angered him. And White responded with a yell.

"*Curare!* Sure it's *curare!* Poison, I told you —— it, how many times do you have to be told, blockhead? Poison—lousy low-lived yellowbellies, they'll die, they'll die—tear the guts out of 'em, I will! Blood! Blood! Death and damnation to all of 'em! Yeeeeee!"

He ended with a scream worse than that of a furious cat, and in the dimness those black hands of his rose and hung like the claws of some shadowy fiend. Both Juancito and the doubled-up doctor seemed to shrink from him; and I knew that quiet little chief to be afraid of very few things. But the old man cowering beside the fire persisted in his demand.

"*Sal!*" he piped. "*Sal!*"

"*No lo tengo,*" I replied. "I have none. Does a man carry salt through rivers and rain? At my camp is salt, but none is here." I moved my hand toward the little basket, still on my back. "You fools," I went on, "why did you not send to me for salt if it was needed, instead of wasting time in useless boiling of a useless pot? Salt in plenty you could have had. But now— It is six days' hard travel to my place, and six days back. Twelve days!"

There I stopped, with a gesture toward Juana. In twelve days she would be far beyond the help of salt or any other earthly thing.

Nobody answered. There was no answer to make. So I turned toward the door, intending to go into the *paragua*, eat, rest, and think; also, to try there to learn more about this mysterious poisoning. I could do none of these things here; and there was nothing else I could do.

But I turned back. Glancing over my shoulder at Juana, I had found her eyes open. They rested on me.

Perhaps it was White's wild scream that had roused her from her death-like sleep. At any rate, she now was conscious. And those big brown eyes, larger than ever in her thin face, seemed speaking to me. I stepped back to her.

"*Buen' noche'*, Juana," I said, as I had done at those bygone night camps where she and her man had come to me from the dark. "*Cómo está uste'?* How are you?"

I did not expect an answer. But one came. Her thin lips trembled, and then came a weak whisper.

"I die."

Slowly I nodded. There could be no denying this.

"It is true," I said soberly. "You die. So must we all. But you have lived while you lived. Few women have lived so."

In the big eyes seemed to grow a faint smile. They moved to the gaunt black shape looming beyond in the dusk.

"And you still have your man," I added. "While you live he is with you. But when you are gone, where shall he go?"

There was a silence. Without the slightest sound, Black White drifted like a shadow to stand beside both of us. I felt him there, but did not look at him.

"He has suffered much," I went on. "Now he suffers more. And he says that because you go many others shall suffer also. All the people of Uaunana shall die."

A strange look crept into the wan face—a look I could not read. White made a low sound deep in his throat.

"If you could live, this would not come about," I concluded. "And there are still four days. Try hard to live longer. If you can not, try to save your man and your people. Think of a way. And now, until tomorrow, *buen' noche'*. I go to rest."

With that I walked out. But once more I looked back. White still stood looking down at his woman, and on his ferocious face now was no fury, in his posture no threat. His head dropped, his shoulders slumped, and in every line of him was weariness and sorrow.

"Poor ——!" I said to myself.

And I shut the door and went away.

IV

WHEN I came again in to the room where the men of the tribe were gathered, every eye fastened itself on me and every ear waited to hear what I should say. But I said nothing at all. Up to the fire I went. And there I took off my useless medicine-basket, squatted, and made a *cigarrillo*.

Frasco and Gil, seeming relieved by my return, unbound my hammock and slung it from overhead poles. Others, finding that I did not mean to talk, brought cassava, fruit, smoked meat, and a jar of water. By the time my cigaret was finished my meal and my bed were ready; and I ate heavily of the one and lay down heavily in the other, feeling tired. And in all this time nobody spoke.

Then one of the older men asked—

"What thing now shall come to Uaunana?"

"What is to be will be," I replied.

It was a saying which I had heard their chief use more than once, and which they could take as they liked. Also, it told them almost all I knew. For, except for the certainty that Juana would die, I could see very little of what lay ahead.

For some time after that I lay thinking and puzzling. If anything, I was even more in the dark regarding matters here than I had been before I came. Although I still felt that Juana was dying from *curare* poisoning, I could not understand why, if this was true, she had not died much sooner. And if her sickness could be cured by salt, why had salt not been sent for? Those men who first brought the news to my district had come from here, and they had not known that salt was needed; neither had they known the real nature of her ailment. If salt was not the cure, why had that *médico* demanded it? And why had Juancito given me that ugly look when I spoke of *curare?* And why was White so bitter now against the Uaunana folk? Was there truth in his accusation that they—her own family tribe—had murdered her? This I could not believe. Was he so cruelly hurt by her loss that his disordered brain turned savagely on whoever was nearest? This seemed more likely.

One thing very clear to me now was that the man was in torment as he watched his woman go. Even now, perhaps, he did not realize how much he had come to care for her, but he was suffering none the less. And in one way his anguish had made him more sane, in another more mad.

The fact that he had come to me in the light was proof that a part of his mania was gone, at least for the time. On learning that I had come with medicines his first thought had been for her, not for himself. And this in itself was a marvel, for never before had I known him, sane or insane, to think of any one else first. True, his bitterness had flared out as soon as he began to talk, and for the moment her welfare had been forgotten in vengefulness. But when I reminded him again of her, that fury had turned to such anxiety that he found my pace toward her too slow. And his gloom and grief as I left him beside her told a plain tale.

But when she was gone—we all knew what would come then, unless some way of preventing it could be found. And I felt that the only chance of preventing it, except by killing White, lay in Juana herself. This feeling had come to me all at once as I stood there beside her, and so I had spoken as I did. Just what she could do I did not know; indeed, it seemed impossible that she, almost gone, could do anything. Yet, since she still could speak, she still could think; and perhaps in her weakness she might exert a stronger influence on the queer mind of her man than ever she had in her strength. If she could not or would not—

There I stopped thinking of the things of tomorrow, for I saw no end. And said I to myself, as I had said to those around me: "What is to be will be." And I turned over, and was fast growing drowsy, when another thought came to me. Frasco and Gil, both in the same hammock, were lying less than a yard from me. Speaking very low, I told them:

"*Muchachos*, an evil thing is here at Uaunana. Men will not tell me what it is. The *capitán* is angry when I ask. The *médico* will not answer. El Blanco Negro has told me, but his words may be twisted in his mouth. Now you shall ask among the men of this place. I must know what it is that kills Juana. It is not fever. It is a thing for which the *médico* wants salt. You shall learn what this thing is and how it came here. Then you shall tell me quietly. When I know what it is I may know of a way to drive it out, and so to stop much more evil from coming."

The pair said not a word in reply, but their faces spoke for them. They would try. So I closed my eyes, listened to a new rain pouring hard on the roof, and, for the first time in a week, went to sleep in comfort. And I knew nothing more that night.

My men, too, slept hard and long. They did not try at once to get the information I had asked, for they were too tired. We three were the last in the house to rise in the morning, and even then we were sluggish, as men often are when they have ended a strenuous march and find time to rest. As soon as we had eaten, however, I walked out, giving Frasco a look that he understood. Glancing back from the doorway, I saw him, and Gil also, starting a lazy talk with some of the older men.

OUTSIDE I found a morning bright and clear, the sun rolling up in a sky misty but not rainy. Several men who had gone out before me were standing about with weapons in hand as if about to go hunting; but they did not go. It seemed very quiet. All at once I realized that no woman or child had come into sight since my arrival, and that, though the weather was good, no woman now was doing the usual cassava work.

"Where are the women?" I asked the nearest man.

He did not reply. But his eyes moved toward the forest. Puzzled, I followed his look. Then I scowled as I understood. All the women and children had been taken to some secret retreat where they would live until their men felt it safe for them to return—or until nothing was left of those men and their tribe-house. The shadow of Black White's impending murder-madness was indeed lying heavy on Uaunana.

Turning to the right, I walked directly to the little palm house with the closed door. Without call or knock, I entered. Inside I found only two of the four whom I had left there: Juana and the medicine man.

The frail form in the hammock seemed to have grown even more thin during the night. Her eyes were closed, and I could see no sign of breathing. As before, I laid hand over her heart; and, as before, found it still beating. But the faint throb seemed a little weaker, a trifle slower.

The *médico*, squatting beside his coals just as on the previous evening, watched me with the same piercing squint. After looking at him a minute I asked—

"Where is *el capitán?*"

He moved his head sidewise about an inch, to show that Juancito had gone somewhere outside.

"And El Blanco Negro? Is he near?"

"*Ugh-ugh*," he grunted, with that falling tone which, in the dialect, means "No."

Those two answers had told me what I really wished to know; that is, that he understood Spanish. I knew he could say "*Sal*," but I was not sure whether he could speak or comprehend other words. And if I had asked him "*Habla español?*" he might have pretended ignorance of my language. In such matters Indians often are queer.

"*Bien*," I said. "Let us talk. You know me—Loco León. I do not know you. You are not of Uaunana. From where do you come?"

A wooden look came over his face, and he began stirring a mess of herbs in the clay pot. But I quickly convinced him that he had better use his tongue.

"Are you a real *médico*," I demanded, "or only an empty liar—or, perhaps, a poisoner? I find this woman dying slowly. I find you beside her, making unknown mixtures in your pot. I feel that an evil thing is here. That evil thing may be you. If I speak this thought to El Blanco Negro—"

There I paused. As my words sunk into him he seemed to shrivel like a spider that has been struck.

"Now say who and what you are!" I commanded, with a hard look. And this time he responded quickly, and rather proudly too.

"*Viejito del Merevari.* The best healer of the Uayungomos."

"The Little Old One of the Merevari," I repeated, staring at him.

I had heard Indians speak of such a man, particularly when I had been on that river Merevari. The Merevari is the upper part of the Rio Caura, and flows not many leagues from the Ventuari, but in a different direction; and its people, though of the same blood as the Maquiritares, call themselves Uayungomos. This man, then, was the most expert doctor in all the Maquiritare nation.

"*Pues*, that is better," I admitted. "I have heard of Viejito. But how comes Viejito at this place? To cross the mountains from the Merevari at this season is impossible."

"Viejito was called. Viejito is here." A faint, sarcastic smile crossed his wrinkled lips as he went on stirring his stew.

"*Bien*. Since Viejito has done the impossible in coming here, and since he is the mightiest healer in all the land, why does he not cure a sick woman?"

For the space of a dozen breaths he made no response. Then, calmly, he said—

"There are three things no man can cure."

"*Sí?* And they are?"

"Death. Madness. One other."

"And that other is?"

His head tipped toward Juana.

"Ah. The *curare*."

Again he was silent. Not by word nor look nor motion did he admit that I had guessed rightly.

"The poison of the *curare* can be cured by salt," I went on. But he would not concede this either—at least, not directly.

"Famine can be cured by food," was his retort. It was almost the same as telling me that I was a fool to speak of salt where no salt was.

I stood a minute watching him and thinking. Steadily, though slowly, he continued stirring the stuff in the clay vessel. But his eyes kept glancing at me cornerwise.

"Then," said I, "you can not cure this woman. If that is so, why toil?"

"Viejito does what he can."

"Ah. You keep her alive as long as may be. And how long is that?"

"Until the moon goes into the dark."

"No longer?"

"Ugh-ugh."

His tone was certain. And I knew that it would come to pass as he said. Although I now believed that he was doing his best, and although yesterday I had tried to put into Juana's mind the will to live, I felt in my heart that there could be no prolonging of her time. For it is a fact—although I can not say why—that among the Indians and the other living things of our Guayana the wax and wane of the moon have effects which no man can change. And if one lies near death as the moon grows weak, life goes when the moon dies.

"Well, then, what is to be will be," I said. "But now tell me, does this woman lie always asleep?"

"Ugh-ugh. At times she awakes."

"But not often?"

"It is so."

"Can you, with your medicines, bring her to wakefulness and a clear mind?"

"Why?"

"I must talk with her."

"And tell her I poison her." The sarcastic smile showed again.

"But no," I denied. "I must talk to her of El Blanco Negro. You heard what I said to her last night. Now I must learn whether she can stop the evil he may do."

At that he turned and gave me a long, sharp look. When he had read my face he arose, stepped to the door, and peered up at the sun. Then he told me—

"Come when the sun stands in the middle of the sky."

"*Bien*," said I, and I left the house.

For a time after that I sauntered aimlessly about in the clearing, then wandered off down to the port, where the dugouts floated heavily, half full of rain-water. For the sake of doing something, I bailed out one of these with a big gourd which I found hanging on a stub. Then I got into it, sat on a low slat seat, rested and smoked. The clearing and its house and people were shut out from view by the hillside bush and timber, and the spot was cool, quiet, and solitary; a place to think undisturbed.

All my thinking, though, got me nowhere. Indeed, after going over the same thing forward and backward I began to grow drowsy, and my mind wandered off to the things that had been, long ago; the day when I had brought that handsome young dog of a White to this same port, undreaming of what was to come; the days following, when Juana, then in the first full bloom of young womanhood, had come to him so often in the sunlight—and then in the moonlight, while all the rest of her tribe slept; and that terrible, unforgettable day when he found himself black, and she, in short, hard sentences, told him he was for all time her man. All this, and much more, came back to me as if only days, not years, had passed. And my mind still was back in those bygone times when my ears caught a soft footfall, and I looked up quickly to find on the shore my man Gil.

Now I had not expected much from Gil when I set those two *muchachos* of mine to probing for the truth. He was more slow and silent than Frasco, and it was Frasco whom I had judged the more likely to succeed. So, seeing this fellow stand there with face as blank as that of the muddy *caño*, I asked curtly—

"What do you want?"

A slow smile grew on his heavy mouth. And he said:

"I want nothing. I bring what you want."

He had dug up the thing which his smarter companion had not been able to bring to light.

V

"BUENO!" said I. *"Aquí!"* And I pointed to the space before me in the canoe. Gil came in, squatted, looked back up the path and then told me much in few words.

"This is the way of this thing, *patrón:*

"Juana and El Blanco Negro came to visit Juancito. This they have often done. This time a small boy had found somewhere a dart tipped with *curare.* None knows where he got it. He is a boy born foolish. Juana sat on a log talking to other women. The boy crept up and jabbed her back to see her jump. So the *curare* entered her blood.

"The dart was old, the *curare* weak. But not too weak to kill. The medicine man cut the place. The blood ran out. He put on herbs. He made smoke magic. He did all possible. Juana did not die. But she stiffened and wasted. She could not move.

"The boy hid behind stumps. He crept from one to another and so away. Few knew who he was. They kept silence. Juana did not know. El Blanco Negro does not know. But the dart was found. So it is known she was poisoned so. Because none will tell who did it, the *negro loco* blames all. He says it was a plot; all meant to have her killed, shot in the back. So he will kill all. He has sent for his men."

"Válgame Dios!" I exclaimed.

And I sat there staring. Never could I have imagined such a twist as this. Juana, who with her man had long traversed the wildest parts of a wild country, faced with him the fiercest men and beasts, gone through savage wars, now done to death in her own home by a half-witted child!

The thing was fantastic. Yet it was fact. And, as I thought about it, it seemed to be fate. Her death was destined to come about at this time. But for what cause, what purpose? To this question there was yet no answer.

"But why," I asked, "was no word sent to Loco León—no message asking for salt or other aid? And where are the wise men of the Ventuari—the *médico* of Uaunana, and that cunning healer of the Caño Uaychamo? I have not seen them. There is only Viejito, of the Merevari. Why is he here alone?"

Gil was silent for some minutes, arranging all these quick questions in his deliberate mind. Then he told me:

"This thing is a great disgrace to Uaunana. *El capitán* would not allow Loco León to know it.

"The *médico* of Uaunana is dead. El Blanco Negro struck him with closed hands because he did not make Juana well.

"The *médico* of Uaychamo was here. He ran away before El Blanco Negro could knock him dead.

"Viejito was brought here after those other doctors had failed. El Blanco knows he is the mightiest healer in the land. But when Juana dies Viejito will die."

So this was why Juancito had been none too well pleased by my coming and much displeased by my guess at the truth. Those Maquiritares have their pride, and it is as stiff-necked as the pride of their Carib ancestors. So stiff was that of Juancito that he would let his girl die rather than let the shame of his tribe be known to a white man, and would hold all his men here to face death rather than hand over the foolish child to the mad vengeance of another man who had been white. And this was why Viejito, dragged here to cure a hopeless case, was doing what he could to keep Juana alive; he was prolonging his own life also. It was no wonder that he had flinched when I made that random threat to loose the fury of Black White on him.

"Where are the men of El Blanco?" I asked.

"Two were here with him. He sent them to bring the rest."

"When?"

"Three days ago."

"And where is El Blanco today? And Juancito?"

"El Blanco went into the forest. *El capitán* tracks him."

Gil looked around him again, narrowly scanning every tree and bush. And so did I, half expecting to see creeping forms armed with rifles, or a grim black face, or a listening spy. But the green screen everywhere was empty.

Then I looked overhead, and what I saw there brought me to my feet. The sun stood at midday.

"Gil, you have done well," I praised the quiet fellow. "When we return to my *sitio* you shall have the best knife you ever owned, and three fine big red handkerchiefs also. Say nothing of what you know."

With that I left him and hastened up the hill, swiftly planning what I should do next. Now that I knew what had been, I could try to shape the next thing to be.

THIS time I found the door of the house of sickness wide open, letting in the sultry warmth and the pale light of misty moon. On the low sill sat Viejito, huddled together like a skinny old bat, and, with his lids tight-drawn, looking as blind as one. But he spied me the instant I rounded the tribe-house wall, and unfolded himself with a promptness that showed he had been waiting for me. As soon as I passed within he closed the plank barrier against all other comers.

When my sight had adjusted itself to the sudden dimness I saw that the old fellow had kept his word. Juana was awake; and not only awake but more alert than at our last meeting. In the great eyes was a little of the old glow, in the face a tint of the former life-light.

"*Buen' dia,*" I greeted her. "You look much stronger today. Have you decided to live again, as I told you to do?"

Her voice, as she answered, was quite strong, though calmly resigned.

"I must die."

"It is a pity. Then, have you thought of a way to give life to the others of Uaunana?"

"I have thought of nothing. I slept."

"Ah! But you remember what I said to you?"

"I remember. And I remember it was these of Uaunana who destroyed me." A touch of bitterness was in her tone.

"Not so, Juana. It was but one of these, and that one not right in mind. Shall all die because of that one?"

She stared at me.

"*No comprendo.* I do not understand."

"So I thought." I nodded. "Nor did I understand until today. But a voice now has come to me, telling the truth of this thing. And I will tell you that truth, for it is right that you should know.

"There was here at Uaunana a *niño* who was born with a mist in his brain. And because of that mist he was a *bobo*—a fool. And the Father of Fools showed this *bobo* an old dart on which was the *curare.* So the *bobo,* not knowing what he did, crept up behind Juana as she sat on a log, and with this sharp dart he pricked her to make her jump. He meant no harm. It was a thing the Father of Fools made him do. And when Juana did jump he hid among logs, and so was not seen. Then it came to his misty mind that he had done a wrong thing, and so he crept away and was gone. Where he is now, the voice did not tell me. But he is somewhere in the forest, and it may be that even now he is dead, killed by some *tigre* or great serpent. Now is it right that all the rest, who had no hand in this thing, should die because of it?"

The brown eyes watched me closely as I talked. There was a short silence.

"They are your own people," I added. "And they are much grieved and greatly disgraced by the action of that *bobo.*"

"The *bobo* should die." Her voice was hard. Then, more slowly, "But not the others."

"*Bien.* As I say, that *bobo* may already be dead. But, as you say, no others should die. Yet the voice which came to me said that your man has sent for his *guerreros* to destroy all here. Yes, even this faithful *médico*, Viejito, best in the land, will be killed because you die. Already your man has killed Sabio, the wise man of Uaunana, because he did not make you well."

A surprized look, followed by a frown, met this news. Her gaze turned to Viejito, standing lank and gloomy against the door. While her eyes were on him I took time to speak well of him; for I felt sorry for the old fellow.

"Viejito has done all that could be done for you. No man could have toiled more faithfully or with greater skill. But there are three things which even he can not cure—death, madness, *curare*. All else he can conquer. So great a wise man should not be paid with a cruel end."

Now as I said this an odd expression came into the wasted face in the hammock, and the big eyes grew still more wide, as if seeing something new and strange. I looked, but saw only the old doctor standing unchanged. After a time she turned her gaze from him to the roof, and now her eyes seemed to grow cloudy with thought.

"It is for you, Juana, in the time you have left, to make a way for saving your people," I urged her. "You now know the truth. You know also that your man is mad. And you know that it was you who first made him so. Thus you are responsible for what he does. Now you cannot undo what you have done to him. But you still have power, perhaps, to make him a little more sane in his grief—even now he does not seem quite so mad as before, except when his rage rises—and so you may turn him from his hunger for blood of Uaunana. Unless you can do this I see only one way to stop a terrible slaughter of innocent people."

"What?" she quickly questioned.

"To kill him. And after him, his *guerreros*."

Her mouth hardened, and the look she gave me was harder.

"I have always been his friend," I reminded her. "I tell you this truth now because I still am his friend." At that her expression grew more gentle.

"Where is he?" she breathed.

"Out in the forest. Sorrowing for you."

"Does he know the thing you have told me?"

"The truth about the *bobo?* No. Perhaps he ought to be told of it. But I leave that in your hands. I feel that he will be with you again before long. Say to him what your mind tells you is best. And keep this also in your mind, Juana— If he brings war and death on this place he will be killed in doing so. A voice tells me that this is truth. Thus all those who have been yours will die to no good purpose. And the name of Juana, who made this madman to destroy her own people, will be a stench throughout the land!"

It became very quiet in the little house. Juana made no answer by word or look; she seemed to be gazing at something beyond the walls that rose round about. Viejito stood as before, voiceless and motionless. Presently I turned away.

"Now I go," I said. "I shall see you another time."

As I stepped to the door I made a sign to the old man. He opened the way and followed me out. Just beyond the wall I said, speaking low:

"You have heard. You must keep her awake that she may talk to her man."

He grunted in a way that might mean anything or nothing; but a glimmer in his eyes told me that he would do as I said. So I left him.

The sky now was rapidly growing thicker, and more rain was at hand. Perhaps the downpour might drive Black White back here *pronto*, or perhaps not. I only hoped he had not gone to meet those fierce men of his.

For a few minutes I stood at the door of the *paragua* looking at the jungle wall, dark, mysterious, growing more and more dusky and ominous as the light failed. What was now going on beyond that gloomy curtain? Were men filing along there, bringing death in their hands to this place? Were they lurking just beyond that encircling border line, awaiting the time when their master should howl them in to kill and burn? Or had that master already fallen, shot in the back that morning by the trailing Juancito, determined to save his tribe? Or had he caught the little chief spying on him and throttled the life from him? Chilling thoughts, these, that seemed to steal in on me from all about as the shadows deepened. I shook them off, shrugged, and went into the big house to eat and take *siesta*. There was nothing else to be done. The fate of this place now lay in the paralyzed hands of a woman almost dead.

Toward night I arose again and walked out. The rain had ceased for a time. Quietly I strolled to the little palm house; and there, without making myself known, I stood and listened.

Beyond that loose wall sounded the voice of Juana, low, yet steady and firm. She was speaking to some man who grunted now and then; but what she said I could not understand, for the words were those of that difficult Maquiritare dialect which I never have learned. Black White had come back, I thought. But then, as other voices spoke, I became doubtful. Two other men talked in turn, and neither was White. Juana said some thing further. A male voice growled. Another droned. And as the conference went on I became sure that one of the men was Juancito, the other Viejito. Juana, to judge by her tones, was asserting her will; her father was objecting, the doctor agreeing with her statements. White, if there, was strangely silent.

Then came the light plash of a foot in a rain-puddle, and beside me loomed White himself. Wet from hair to heels, with bits of bark and fragments of spider-web sticking to beard and skin, he showed plainly that he had just emerged from the forest. For a second he halted and looked at me, cold-eyed, hard-mouthed, expressionless; neither sane nor insane, friend nor enemy. I looked straight back at him, saying nothing. Then inside sounded again the voice of his woman. It now came weak and tired.

At that sound he started and stared as if unbelieving. Then he threw himself at the door, crashed it open, and was gone within. At his sudden appearance all voices were stilled.

As quietly as I had come, I went away. And as I went I wondered. What sort of thing had those three Indians discussed so earnestly? I could not know. But afterward, looking back at that time, I was to realize that I had been listening to the weirdest council ever held at Uaunana.

VI

THE next day Viejito disappeared. That morning I was up early eager to learn what talk had passed between Juana and her mate, and intending to draw this information from the old *médico*. The sun, wallowing up fast behind broken clouds, had not topped the trees when I was at the door of the palm house. But, early as I was, the doctor had moved earlier. As I pushed through the little doorway I found beyond it only man and wife.

A pair of hammocks, slung side by side, held the couple; Juana sunk once more into her death-like trance, Black White sitting up in his cotton net and glaring at me, angered by my abrupt intrusion. A glance around the room told me that neither doctor nor chief was there, and that the coals which had been so carefully tended were now dead embers. Another glance at White warned me not to linger; for his harsh features were ugly and growing more so. Nevertheless I paused long enough to assure myself that life still remained in the motionless form beside him. This done, I gave him a short nod and walked out.

As I turned my steps back toward the *paragua* doorway, out from it came Juancito. He had not slept with us in the central room last night, but it was quite clear that neither had he remained in the palm house. Perhaps, I thought, he had secreted himself in the family quarters between the walls, with the idea of listening to whatever talk might go on in the main room. If so, he had learned nothing from me, for I had said nothing at all. Now, seeing me returning from his daughter's side, he advanced with a questioning look.

"Juana is the same," I said. "El Blanco Negro is in bad humor. Viejito is gone."

He showed no surprize. An unpleasant thought came to me. Had the old healer gone out by the same road as Sabio, the wise man of Uaunana? Jerking a thumb backward, I clutched my throat, raising my brows at the chief.

"Ugh-ugh," he denied.

But he gave no explanation of the doctor's absence. After vainly waiting a minute for him to speak further, I said—

"*Bien.* Now what of El Blanco Negro? Has his heart softened toward the people of Uaunana?"

"Ugh-ugh."

"No? That is bad. Then what is to be done?"

There was a long pause. A loud breeze rushed over the clearing, tossing the chief's glossy black hair. The rising sun threw queer little glints across his brown eyes, and far down in the black pupils seemed to flicker a mocking smile. A few yards away, men who had followed him out watched and listened intently; and, although he did not look toward them, I knew that he knew they were there. The reply that presently came was what I might have expected.

"What is to be will be," said Jauncito.

And he walked onward, entered the palm house, and shut the door.

I laughed carelessly, though feeling a little vexed. The Indians grinned. Passing by them, I re-entered the tribe-house and ate my breakfast. As I ate, I said quietly to Frasco and Gil:

"Juana lives, but Viejito is not here. Do you know where he is?"

They did not. But before long they were talking with others, and as I loafed and smoked after the meal Frasco came back.

"The Little Old One went into the forest at the first light," he reported. "With him went Sabito."

"Who is Sabito?" I wondered.

"Son of Sabio, who was wise man here."

"*Si?*" I pondered a minute, then asked—"Why should those two go together?"

"None knows. Perhaps the old one makes new medicine."

"Oh. Sabito, son of Sabio, knows where all plants of medicine can be found?"

"It is so."

This gave me a new thing to think about. Viejito knew no cure for Juana. Nobody else here was sick. Why, then, hunt medicines? It did not seem sensible. Perhaps the old fellow was not hunting such things at all, but, with this as a pretence, was sneaking away from here while life remained to him. I could hardly blame him. Yet this did not seem quite probable, either. If that were his intention, why take Sabito with him?

Then I nearly jumped from my hammock, struck by a sudden suspicion. That mysterious conference last night, ending so suddenly when Black White appeared, came back to me. Juana and Viejito had been in agreement on some point, Juancito reluctant. Had Juana, who once poisoned her man into blackness of life, decided now to poison him into the blackness of death, and so take him with her beyond the grave? *Por Dios*, it would be like her!

In that way, too, she could solve the problem I had put on her—the saving of her tribe. And I myself, *válgame*, had said that the way to prevent a slaughter would be to kill him! And Viejito wished to live, and he was wise in the ways of all poisons. And that Sabito, whose father had been killed by the madman, would be glad enongh to show this cunning old fellow where all such things could be found. Probably Viejito would not be so simple as to tell the young man what he meant to do; but Sabito would understand and lead him to whatever plants or barks or roots he wanted—particularly if told to do so by his own *capitán*.

But Juancito had made objection, I remembered, to the thing under discussion. Yet his disagreement would be natural enough, both because of pride and of caution. One accidental poisoning here was a disgrace; two, with the second deliberately planned, would be infamous. And the vengeance of the Thirty Gang when the thing became known—that was something to make a man bolder than Juancito hesitate. But, no doubt, Viejito knew of poisons so subtle that death from them would seem natural; and White's *guerreros*, and all the people of Uaunana as well, would believe that he had died from the violence of his own madness. Quite likely the *médico* had convinced Juancito of this in the night, the pair whispering in some recess of the *paragua* where none could hear. And that was why the chief was not surprized by my news of the doctor's absence, and inwardly laughed at my ignorance!

I strode out of the place, meaning to warn White at once to be on his guard. But as I came into the daylight I hesitated. In truth, would it not be better for all the world—yes, even for White himself—if he should pass out suddenly in this way? If he did, he and all the rest of us would be at peace; if not, he would be a tortured devil, and we should find ourselves in a bloody hell.

I did not enter that palm house. I walked three times around the big *paragua*, struggling with myself, and passing each time within a few feet of White—and I said no word. And at the end of the third circuit my mind was made up. Already I had meddled enough here. Now I would keep hands off and mouth shut, and let that be which was to be.

Having reached this determination, I then decided to leave the settlement behind me for a time. So, with Frasco and Gil, I went on a hunting trip. For the rest of the day we rambled, halting once to cook some game, and twice more to let roaring showers pass over. As we moved about I kept eyes open for any sign of Viejito, the hidden women and children, or the dreaded warriors of White; but no trace of any of these was found. It was almost dark when we returned to the *paragua*, wet and tired; and we soon went to bed. Before I slept, though, Frasco said in my ear—

"Sabito is here."

So I knew that Viejito must have returned—probably hours ago—and, quite likely, was even now brewing some infernal mixture. But I made no move.

THE next morning, though, I strolled again to Juana's quarters. Smoke was rising once more from the roof-hole. Within sounded no voice. After standing beside the door a minute I went in. Again I found only two persons there; but not the same two. This time they were Juana and Viejito.

Juana's heart-beat now was so slight that I could hardly detect it. And her doctor was giving her no attention whatever. Neither did he notice me, except for one short look. All his mind was on a queer-smelling brownish liquid cooking in a new clay pot. As I watched, he took from a tiny basket a thin yellow root, which he measured very exactly with a thumb-nail; then, with a knife, he cut off about an inch and a half, dropped this section into the brew, and poked it down with a slender bird-bone. As he did so, something else rose from the bottom, then sank again. It was a piece of the skin of a snake.

"Ugh!" I grunted, feeling a little squirmy at the stomach.

And now I saw that beyond the fire lay parts of the skins of three different snakes; a gray *mapanare*, a blue-black *daya*—both poisonous—and a yellow-brown *traga venado*, or boa. Scorched bits of roots, of lianas, and of leaves also lay about at the edge of the fire—fragments which he had dropped carelessly after using what he wanted.

At my grunt Viejito shot a quick glance at me. And at something he saw in my face he gave me a piercing look that seemed to go through my head. It was as sharp and hostile as a war-arrow.

That look, and the sight of the damnable stuff he made, and the thought of its purpose, angered me somewhat; and I forgot my resolution to keep my mouth shut.

"You still work for the welfare of Juana?" I sneered, jerking a finger toward the snake-skins.

He made no answer in words; but his expression became a threat. This angered me still more.

"You old *demonio*, I am of a mind to break your skinny neck and smash that pot!" I snapped.

Coolly, but quickly, he picked up his knife. Without rising, he crept between me and his precious vessel, holding the weapon ready for an upward stab at my bowels. I was unarmed, for I had left both rifle and poniard in the *paragua*. But at that menacing move I nearly loosed a kick for his face. However, I caught myself in time.

"Ho!" I jeered. "You creeping lizard, you would bite, yes? But go back to your work of the devil. For, after all, you carry out the will of Juana. And since you are so daring as to cook this mess under the very nose of El Blanco and to face me in defense of it, be sure I shall not upset it. *Adios*, snake!"

I stepped again to the door. Looking back, I saw blank surprize settle on him. He looked at me, at Juana, and again at me, sorely perplexed.

"Viejito, walls have ears," I mocked. "And I know what I know. But have no fear. I tell no tales. Be thankful that it was the mad *león*, not the mad black *tigre*, who stood beside the wall."

Comprehension came to him then, and with it another keen look at me. Then said Viejito—

"Let the *león* bite on his tongue and hold it still."

"Have no fear," I repeated. As I went out he turned swiftly back to his work.

I walked away and sat down on a weather-bleached tree-trunk, vexed at myself for having let temper and tongue slip. And said I to myself— "Now, you fool, you shall say no more. You have given your word to be dumb, and have made yourself a party to this thing. And from now until the end you shall keep out of that house. Juana will not awake again. Nobody else wants you there. Stay out and stay silent."

And so I did. From that time until after Juana passed into the dark I saw nothing more of the inside of that house, or the four people who used it. Where and when and how Black White and his watchful shadow, Juancito, went and came I do not know. What Viejito did I did not see. Twice I heard—as everyone else heard—violent ravings in White's harsh tones, once in the little house and once receding down the hill toward the forest. Otherwise there was quiet and the strain of waiting.

The end came in silence. The horrible yelling and the lurid violence which most of us had expected did not come about at all. Instead of shrieks and shots and blows and blood, there was only a dismal drench of rain, a sweeping wind, and empty clearing and a voiceless *paragua*. All of us knew that Juana must have gone; for the moon was dead in a black sky. But, as the night wore on, no human noise or movement came from any place around us. And at last, with a sigh, I said to myself—

"They have done it, They poisoned him before she went. Both of them now lie there, side by side, dead. So she has her man, and we have peace. *Bien*. It is better so. And if there be any such hereafter as the priests say, perhaps they are far happier now because of the will of a woman and the work of the Little Old One. Peace to their souls!"

Long I lay there thinking of the things that had been. And over me came a great sadness. Perhaps it was the dismal night, the rain and the wind, that worked on my mind, or perhaps it was pity for the pair who had borne so much together; but I almost wept. Yes, I, the hardened Loco León!

At last I went to sleep, and as I slept I dreamed that Black White came out of the past and walked with me as he once had; once more a white man, once more right in mind. Yet he did not look the same. He was older, and down his face were long scars, as if claws or nails had torn him; and the old carelessness was gone, and he never smiled. After a time he reached over and took my rifle from me, saying: "You don't need this, old chap. I'll take it for a while." And I, who have never given up my gun to any man, let him have it. Then he began to go away from me in a misty twilight, and all at once he was gone.

I awoke then, finding pale dawn dropping from the smoke-hood and faintly lighting the *paragua*. Near me stood several men of Uaunana, all watching me gravely, and all armed with spears. A fresh fire was growing on the floor. Something made me look down for my rifle. I came up with a jerk. It was gone.

Frasco and Gil, too, were disarmed. As I looked hotly around, one of the Maquiritares spoke in almost the words of my dream.

"You do not need your gun. We have taken it for a time."

The three of us were prisoners.

VII

FOR three days I was not allowed to step outside the *paragua*. Nor was Frasco or Gil. And, scold or swear as I might—and at first I did both—I made no more impression on the Uaunana guards than if my voice had been empty wind.

"Do not be angry with us, Loco," they calmly said. "It is the order of *el capitán*. And it is not for long."

"How long?" I demanded.

"We do not know. But not long. And no harm is meant. Have no fear."

"I have no fear of anything this side of ——," I retorted. "But Juancito goes too far. Send him here to me! I have a good deal to say to him."

A man was sent, but Juancito did not come. And after my first anger passed I made the best of it. I knew that although all these men were friendly to me, whatever their chief commanded would be done. I saw that every exit was guarded, and that any attempt to force my way out would result only in getting myself hurt. So I settled down to wait as patiently as I might. With a pencil which I usually carry, and with strips of paper-like bark which men brought me, I worked out a number of my plans for moving my balata. At other times I walked around the room for exercise, talked with the Indians, or swore at old Viejito—for I felt in my bones that he was at the bottom of this confinement of mine.

Where that dangerous doctor now was—whether he had gone or still remained here—I could not learn. Neither could I pry from any one a word about Black White. As for Juana, nothing was said of her except what I already knew—

"She is dead."

What had been done with her and her man none would tell, either to me or to my *muchachos*. And I did not ask many questions about either of them. Still less did I give any hint that I had any knowledge of the end of White. That was a thing in which I was not at all proud to have had a hand.

Among those who came and went was Sabito, who had gone with the Little Old One on that mysterious collecting trip in the forest; a grim young man whose brown eyes seemed always cold and hard. From him both Frasco and Gil tried to learn something about the doings of the *médico* on that day; but they might as well have sought to wring blood from a stone. The only words they got from him were short and rude.

So those three days dragged along, useless to me except for my figures on my bark paper, yet, aside from their weariness, not unpleasant. The men watching me were amiable enough, and the food brought was fresh and plentiful. On this matter of my meals I was exceedingly particular. I would eat nothing already prepared, and I examined everything very carefully before allowing my own men to cook it. The Uaunana men were a little offended at this distrust. But at every sight of food I thought of Viejito and his infernal mixtures, and I took no chances. It might suit his purposes quite well to have me join Juana and Black White, thus closing my mouth forever.

Then, on the fourth day, the guards were guards no longer. The spearmen who had watched me went about other matters, giving me no further attention. The doorways which had been blocked by armed men were wide open. My gun had not come back to me, and nobody told me that I was at liberty; but when, after breakfast, I walked out of the room, none interfered.

Once outside, I turned toward the palm house, half expecting to find it open and empty. Instead, it was not only shut but guarded. Beside its door, in the shelter of the projecting roof, squatted a tall fellow holding a tiger lance. And from its roof-hole still arose the thin smoke.

"Now what is this?" I wondered. And I proceeded to find out.

As I approached, the spearman rose. Instead of blocking me, though, he spoke shortly to the wall. A vague sound, like a grunt of reply, seemed to come from within. The guard stood quiet, letting me pass by and open the door. When I entered he closed it behind me. A second later I heard his voice gruffly ordering somebody who had followed me—perhaps Frasco or Gil—to be gone.

Inside I stood as if struck numb and dumb. There, on low stools, sat both Juancito and Viejito, watching me with queer expressions. There on the fire simmered the eternal pot. And there in a hammock lay a man at whom I stared and stared.

His long frame was that of Black White. His muscles and his strong hands were those of Black White. But his face was that of a man strange to me, and his skin stranger still. Instead of a harsh visage glowering in a tangle of black hair and beard, this was a sad, hollow-cheeked face ending in a strong bare jaw and crowned by a bald head. And his skin was neither black nor white, nor yet the light tan of the Maquiritares. It was a dead-looking, ashy gray, blotched here and there with pale red.

WONDERING, I moved nearer to him and scanned him more closely. And now I saw, on cheeks and chest and shoulders, those slashing scars which could belong to only one man. I saw, too, that he lived; for the scarred chest moved in slow breaths. Amazed, I put a hand on him. Instantly came a sharp warning from Viejito.

"Ugh-ugh! Let the *león* keep his paws from this one!"

So sharp was his tone that I lifted my hand at once. And then I stared at it and at the place where it had rested. Beneath that ashy skin was astonishing heat. My palm felt almost scorched.

A curious low moaning sound followed. The half-open lips moved, and from them came wordless mutterings. The lids opened also, and the eyes rested on me. But they did not see me; or, if they did, they failed to know me. They were blank as those of one who sleeps. After a second or two they closed again.

Those eyes were blue. And they and the forehead and nose and jaw were those of White, who had died nine years ago. And the scars and the body and limbs were those of El Blanco Negro, who had died three days ago. And the man who lay there had been both of them, yet now was neither.

If he lived, what sort of creature was this to be?

Speechless, I looked again at Viejito, the little old *demonio* sitting beside the coals. On his thin mouth now was a smile like the cut of a knife.

"It works," he said, a chuckling note in his voice.

Then his face stretched in a laugh without sound; a laugh of pride.

I found my tongue, and something of my temper too.

"You old *diablo!*" I growled. "What are you doing to him?"

At this he cackled. And said he—

"The *león* with long ears stood at the wall."

His meaning quickly came to me. This, then, was the thing which Juana had ordered and he had agreed to do, while I listened outside, misunderstanding. The plan had not been to murder her man, but to do something else to him. But what, in the name of everything unholy, was that thing? And to what end?

Feeling my way, I nodded as if comprehending more than I really did. And I said—

"The *león* heard. But all was not plain. The way of it was not clear."

"Ugh-ugh. Viejito of the Merevari does not tell his ways. They are ways known only to Viejito." He chuckled again, vastly pleased with himself. "But those ways work. See. The skin pales. It burns loose. It will come off. In three days and three."

For a second or two I felt dizzy. The skin was coming off! That black skin which had driven White mad—soon it would be gone! It was not possible. And yet—

Again I saw those snake-skins which had lain beside the pot. Snakes cast their skins, growing new ones. And this *médico* of the Merevari was the wisest wizard in all the land, knowing secrets known to no other. And I saw with my own eyes that the skin of the man who had been Black White was paler, and felt with my own hand that a fearful fire was in him. And, now that I looked close again, I perceived that the ashy skin looked a little loose, while the reddish blotches seemed to stick to him tightly. In those spots, something told me, the new skin had not yet formed. It was true! By the workings of some weird combination of jungle things brewed in the pot of Viejito, he was shedding his hated black hide.

Without asking, I knew that his new skin would be that of a white man. There could be no other object in doing this amazing thing. Now I saw, too, the reason for his baldness of head and smoothness of face: the *médico* had cut and singed away all hair to help the loosening of the old skin. This would be a new man from top to toe.

"*Dios mio!*" I said to myself. "This is a miracle, no less."

Then, aloud:

"The ways of Viejito are marvelous in truth. Yet I can not understand why this man lies so quiet when in him burns so hot a fire. Has Viejito made him powerless?"

"It is so," he promptly responded. "This one knows nothing. He can do nothing. He feels almost nothing. Viejito made him so."

Again I nodded, perceiving that the old plotter must have first stupefied and nearly paralyzed his man by some powerful drug in food or drink, and now must be keeping him always under its influence. Thus the turning and twisting and scratching which would harm the changing skin was prevented. I observed also, when I looked for it, that the hammock was padded with big smooth leaves of *platani*, so that not a cord of the hanging bed could cut or chafe the man in it.

"*Bueno!* It is good," said I. "Yet what is the end of all this? What of the mind of this one? Can the blackness of the mind be cast off with the blackness of the body?"

At this Juancito's eyes narrowed a little, as if the same question had been disturbing him. Viejito answered so quickly and sharply that I suspected arguments between them on this point.

"*Cómo no?* Why not? All blackness came together. All will go together."

"Perhaps." But I was doubtful. For the time, though, I let it pass.

"Three days and three," I added. "Three are gone. In three more, then, shall this new man find himself?"

"*Ugh-ugh.* The days to come are three and three. All the days are three times three. So have been the years."

A day for each year of blackness. Nine days, of which six were left.

"*Bien.*" I turned again to the door, for I wished to leave the place and think. "I shall come again."

"*Bien,*" echoed Viejito. "Let the *león* keep his teeth on his tongue."

Without reply, I left. Outside I looked all about, at the *paragua*, the loitering Indians, the bleached trunks, to assure myself that all this was real; for I felt as if once more dreaming. Then I walked three times around the big house, as I had done a few days ago, to settle my brain. And as I went I remembered that other time and my wish to warn Black White, and thanked luck that I had not done so. Whatever the end now might be, it could hardly be as bad as if I had spoken then.

On the third time I stopped, as before, at the *paragua* door, and looked at the jungle. But this time I had other thoughts. Somewhere over there now lay all that was left of Juana. And now I remembered her odd look at gloomy old Viejito when I had said he could cure all but those three dread things. Those words of mine had put a thought into her head, but not the poisonous one of which I had later suspected her; no, one far more noble than I could have believed possible in her, or even had conceived myself. And now, gazing at those green shadows into which she had disappeared forever, I took off my sombrero.

Only an Indian girl, unbaptized at birth, uncivilized through life, unabsolved at death—the *padres* of the church probably would say she was a *salvaje*, an *infiel*, without a soul. Yet now I felt that, by her passing, this Guayana of ours had lost a great spirit.

VIII

THAT day the women and children came back to Uaunana.

Ever since the night when Juana died there had been an easier feeling among the men of the place; an absence of the former strain, a return of their usual untroubled calm, which I had noticed at once and believed due to the ending of the menace of Black White. But during those three days when I was kept inside the *paragua* the women were kept outside it.

Now, knowing what went on within the little palm house, I wondered why the people here had regained their confidence; for none could be sure of what would come about when that new man should become able to act. But then I concluded that only the chief, the doctor, and I were aware of the real state of things, and that Juancito had briefly told his men that all was well.

Next I pondered over the reason for holding me prisoner and keeping the weaker ones out in the soggy forest. I had been too much amazed to think of this question while in the hut of the miracle man, and I did not feel inclined to go there and ask it now. Neither would I demand my gun, for I felt that it would be returned at the proper time. Yet, after recovering from my amazement, I puzzled over these things, and presently hit on what seemed truth. Viejito, for all his self-satisfaction, had not been certain of success in his uncanny work, and until he could make sure he wished no interference from me; while Juancito, also doubtful, waited to see how matters progressed before calling in his hidden ones. Now both were convinced that everything would go as intended—at least, up to the point where they could learn what sort of mind this new man had. If that mind should prove dangerous to them, it still would be possible for him to die before doing any damage.

Thus I figured out the probable answer to these riddles. And then, as usual, my thoughts went to the days ahead. What of those *guerreros* who had not yet come? What should be done when they did come? And what of their master, when he was no longer under the power of the stupefying drug?

These problems were turning over and over in my head, and reaching no solution, when the women and children came out of the forest. I was sitting on a log and smoking, with my eyes resting on the jungle wall at the very spot where they appeared. At first sight of those moving figures I felt a little concern, for the leaders of the column were armed men. Then, seeing that those men carried Indian weapons instead of rifles, and spying the women behind, I sat quiet. Up the winding path they filed, the armed escort grinning at the rest of us, the women bent forward under heavy backloads but smiling, the children walking at the rear, and the babes riding wherever they might—in baskets, in arms, or astride their mothers' hips. Their path brought them past me, sitting at ease and smiling at them; and, in the joy of reaching home, all smiled back at me—all but one. At sight of that one I sat up straighter and stared.

She was a girl—or rather a young woman, for she was fully formed—whom I had not seen before. This in itself was nothing remarkable, for, in visiting the various settlements, I give very little attention to the women; also, there are small tribe-houses here and there to which I never have gone, since they were far out of my way and of no importance. Besides, little families of the Maquiritares move about at times, so that new faces appear occasionally at the various *paraguas*. The striking thing about this girl was that she had a marvelous resemblance to Juana.

It was not the Juana who had just died,

nor the Juana of recent years, who seemed to have come back. It was the Juana of nine years ago, in the first full flush of womanhood. Height, figure, and face were almost the same. And her straight, steady look at me was even more like that of Juana; an uncommon thing, since Indian girls meeting me for the first time usually glance at me shyly and sidelong. This one, though, had no fun in her face, no smile in her eyes, as that bygone Juana had had until she found that White was weary of her. Her expression was more cold, her eyes a little more hard, as if she were better accustomed to white men and more suspicious of them.

She passed onward and disappeared with the others behind the curved wall, proceeding toward the nearest door used by women. All the men were outside, some joining their families and going on with them, others remaining where they were. Near me stood a Spanish-speaking fellow, rather old, with whom I had talked at various times. To him I spoke.

"Who is that one who walks like a man? She is new here."

"One from the Caura," he answered.

"The Caura? And how comes she here?"

"She came with her brother. He was drowned. So she stays here."

Now the Caura is, as I have told you, the lower part of the Merevari; and all the Maquiritares living there have their habitations near the great fall of Salta Para. I never have been at that place, for it is *sarrapia*—tonca bean—country and not so good for balata. But I know that traders in the *sarrapia* have contact with some of the Indians in the season, and that consequently the Spanish tongue is better known among those Maquiritares than among those of the Ventuari. Usually it is only the male Indians who speak it. But this young woman, who was self-reliant enough to have made the hard traverse to Uaunana with her brother and who looked a new white man straight in the eye, seemed likely to know my language. And suddenly a thought hit me so hard that I nearly slid off the log.

"Does she speak Spanish?" I asked.

"*Sí.*"

"She does! And her name?"

"Felipa."

The old fellow now was watching me curiously, for it was well known that Loco León took no interest in Maquiritare maids. I said no more, but got up and walked away. At the other side of the *paragua* I stood thinking further. Then I did a thing I never had done before; I went to the door of the women and called for a woman.

It was Felipa whom I called. She soon came out, looking a little surprized, and eying me very searchingly. Others gathered at once, both men and women, to look and listen. But if they thought they had scented a romance they found themselves disappointed; for I spoke to the girl on only one subject—her home river, the Caura. Concerning this and its people I asked quite a number of questions. She replied readily enough, though shortly; but what she told me I do not remember, for I had no real interest in the subject. What I wished was to hear her voice, watch her expressions, and test her Spanish. When I was satisfied I walked away again.

Her tones were much like those of Juana, though a little harder. Some of her expressions were almost identical, and her Spanish was fully as good. And now my new idea, which had been a little hazy, became very clear. This girl's resemblance to Juana in appearance and word and look was too close to be left unused. In truth, it seemed that the luck of Loco León had brought her here at this time for the very purpose now in my mind.

Luck also put Juancito in my path just then. I was walking toward the palm house when he came out of it, and, seeing me, stopped. I beckoned, and he came to me. Another storm now was approaching so we went into an open shed, where we could see all about us and talk unheard.

It was a rather toilsome talk for me, because the little *capitán* did not know Spanish well enough to follow my words easily unless they concerned such things as were already in his mind. I did not think it best, however, to call Frasco and speak through his mouth, as I might have done. The less known by others at this time, the better for all. So, by slow and simple Spanish and such few Indian words as I knew, and often by repeating and sometimes by signs, I put before the chief this new idea:

"Viejito has said that when the blackness of the skin goes the blackness of the mind also will go. Yet I am doubtful of this. So are you. Viejito does not know this man as we do. The *médico* is swollen with pride and believes he can cure the one with the other. Perhaps he can. But it would be well for us to do what we can also.

"Now it is in my mind that when the eyes of El Blanco Negro are opened to his whiteness it would be well for him to find all things as they were before he became black. It will be at that time that his mind will turn in one way or the other, and it may be that small things will make much difference in the way of that turn. If all things around him remind him of his blackness and madness, he may straightway become mad again though no longer black. But if he finds everything as it was before his brain first broke, and if none tells him of what he has been, he may find also the mind that was his in other days.

"Now, there have been changes here in the years of his blackness. All of us are older. Some have died. Some have grown from children to men and women. And the hut where this man slept before his change has been torn down and a work-place built there. Yet you and I are not much changed by time. A new hut can be made in the same spot and all arranged in the same way. And El Blanco never was one to notice things or people carefully unless they had an interest for him. So the things most likely to be clearly remembered are the spot where he lived and the faces of three people—you and I and Juana.

"Now Juana is gone. But there is the girl Felipa of the Caura, who looks much like Juana as she was in those days. Let us then make a Juana from Felipa, telling her what to do at that time. Let all your people also be told what to do then. And if all is done as we plan, we may make a man such as we—and Juana—would have him be."

It took me a long time to make all this clear, and a longer time for Juancito to think it over. Rain pounded around us, and night came, and still we stayed there. He asked questions as to what I meant to have Felipa do, and I told him. And in the end he agreed that the plan was good.

"*Bueno!*" said I. "Then tomorrow we shall go about it, making all ready. But now there is one thing that may upset everything. At any moment the *guerreros* of this one may come. He sent for them days ago. They should have been here long since."

At this I felt the chief studying me keenly in the darkness. Then he looked and listened around him. At length he told me—

"The men sent did not reach the *guerreros*."

"*Cómo?*" I exclaimed. "You mean—You sent other men after them?"

He gave no answer, but I saw his teeth shine in the shadow. And I knew this was the truth. Those messengers had been trailed and killed by men of Uaunana.

"*Ajo!* If this ever becomes known— But be sure none will know it from me," I promised. "Yet, even without a message, those men may come. The rains are ending. They will become uneasy."

"It is so," he admitted. "But we shall know. The ways are watched."

"You will not fight them!"

"Ugh-ugh. But we shall be ready."

"Well, then see to it that I also am ready," I said, rising. "My rifle is gone."

"It will come."

And with that we parted, chilled and hungry. A little later, while I was eating in the *paragua*, a man came from the shadows and laid beside me my rifle. I shoved it carelessly under my hammock and let it lie there. And when I lay down in that hammock and, as usual, thought a little about the things of tomorrow, I felt cheerful for the first time since leaving my balata camp.

IX

DAY by day I saw the gray man grow more pale. Each morning and each evening I found his ashy color bleached to a lighter shade. The reddish splotches, too, grew steadily smaller and fewer, changing to a dirty pink hue and then merging in to the lifeless skin around them. And as these spots faded out the whole hide—for it really was a hide, toughened by years of exposure into a thickness unknown to us who go always clothed—this hide grew wrinkled and loose-looking, as if the man inside it were shrinking. And, in truth, he was. Lean as he had been before, he now grew thin as if starved. Toward the last I suspected that he had been given no food, nor any drink except the potions of the *médico*, during all the time of his change.

Then along the lines of the deepest wrinkles in that dry shell came cracks, and it seemed to me that long ragged sections of it could be lifted from him by merely gripping the edges with the nails of thumb and finger. But Viejito would not allow this. Not before the end of the ninth day, he declared, should any part of that gray covering be removed, unless it fell off of itself. As the cracks became more marked he dropped into them some sort of oil from a gourd bottle, carefully following each irregular line, and never wiping off any of it afterward. Too, he managed somehow to change the position of his helpless patient each day, making him lie on one side or the other, or on back or stomach, with arms and legs in various different postures. And he kept every hair of head and face and body singed almost to the root. The old man's whole heart and mind were in this miracle of his. I doubt if he slept more than an hour at a time during the whole nine days and nights. Certainly his temper grew continually worse. As the days wore on he became as peppery as a wasp.

And while he was giving all this watchful care to the man who knew nothing at all about it, the rest of us were making ready for the time when that man should realize where he was. The morning after my talk with Juancito men were put to work altering the work-place which now stood where White's hut had been. It was not torn down, as I had suggested, but remodeled; and this was a better idea than mine, since an entirely new house would have betrayed its newness.

The *capitán* gave this work his personal attention, squatting all day in the middle of the place and directing every change, without informing any one why he wanted this thing thus and that thing so. When it was finished I marveled at the complete likeness of the shelter to the one which had stood there so long ago. Every detail seemed as fresh in the chief's memory as if cut deep in his mind. And, indeed, quite likely it was; for this was the spot where his girl-child had given herself to the handsome stranger, where he had meant to kill that stranger when he learned the truth, where that strong-willed girl had exacted her own black penalty instead, and where she had deserted her father to follow her suddenly crazed mate away into the jungle. A sad spot for the quiet little ruler to reconstruct, this; but, whatever went on within him, he gave no hint of any emotion as he watched it come again into its old-time shape.

By nightfall it was done. The only touches remaining were to restore White's personal belongings to the proper places. I had not the slightest hope of being able to do this, for I supposed all these things had vanished long since. But when I spoke of it Juancito coolly replied that all should be as before, except the yellow palm-fiber hammock. This had rotted to pieces years ago, and must be replaced by a white cotton one of Maquiritare make. All else could be produced. And now I remembered that when White went mad he dashed off into the forest with only rifle, cartridges, and clothing torn to rags; and since that day he probably had never thought of his few other possessions. Yet I was much surprized to learn that those things still were in existence. And when, the next day, Juancito showed them to me, I was still more astonished to find them in such good condition—dingy, it is true, but unharmed by insects or mould. All this time they had been carefully stored in some dry part of the *paragua*, either because the chief thought that some day Black White might demand them, or, more likely, because Juana had wished this to be done.

Thus, then, the matter of the house was disposed of. We did not at once put into it the belongings of the man who was to lie there, keeping these out of sight until the right time. Nor did we tell the people what was to take place, saving this also until Juancito should consider matters ripe. The only one except us three men who knew what was coming was the girl Felipa. To her, after some preliminary talk, the *capitán* and I together unfolded my plan, the chief commanding her to do as I said. And well fitted for her part I found her.

A cool, capable sort of person, this Felipa; and one of those rare women who really can keep their own counsel. She told almost nothing about herself, to me or to others. Even Juancito knew very little about her life before coming to Uaunana. As I talked with her, though, it became evident to me that she had met more than one white man at one place or another, and that she had little love for their ways. And for the white man now about to be reborn here she had no love whatever. Such feeling as she had toward him came very close to hate.

She remembered him, she said. When he had first come up the Caura on that unlucky trip of exploration he had visited the settlement of her people, inducing men of that place to go on with him as guides. All those men had been killed. One of them had been her own father.

She said nothing more than this, but her way of saying it showed that she held White responsible for that death and was more than a little bitter. I came near telling her that, although many killings could be laid against him, he was not to blame for that one. But I held my tongue. Since she had grown from childhood with that feeling against him, she would not be likely to change it now at any word from me. Besides, her grudge fitted well into my plan.

So the days trailed by, not so tedious now; for my time was occupied and the weather was better—the wet season had broken up at last, giving us much bright sun between the short showers. And so came the ninth day.

That morning there could be no question that the gray man would be white. Patches of the dead hide had fallen away, revealing a clean skin which was white in truth—too white, for it lacked the pink glow of health. This was hardly strange, considering how thin his blood had become through fever and lack of food; but at first sight it looked as pale as the belly of a fish. It was cold as a fish, too, as I found by touching him when the cranky old wizard happened to glance away. The heat had all gone from his body now. If his chest had not shown steady breathing I should have believed him dead, burned out.

On each of these newly bared spots Viejito had smeared that warm oil of his; and while I was in the house he kept the bottle constantly in hand, while his tired old eyes went up and down the long body as if expecting more white areas to appear at any moment. To me he gave no attention whatever, except one sour look when I asked some question which he considered foolish. So I grinned at him and went away.

It was on that morning, too, that Juancito told his tribe what the new hut was to hold. By his order, every man, woman, and child came to that hut about midforenoon, all work being stopped so that every one could be there; and to them he made a short talk which brought astonishment to all faces except that of Felipa. Even the guards who had taken turns at duty outside the palm house showed surprize. Later I learned from Frasco that these had not known White was inside that house, but had believed the famous *médico* to be carrying on mysterious magic for the protection of the settlement. In a way, they were quite right.

From Frasco, too, I learned what the *capitán* said. He told his people that by the will of Juana, who once had made a white man a black Maquiritare, the black man now had been made white again; that soon this white man would be found in the hut where he had lain in other years; that none was to speak to him except Loco León, the girl Felipa, and Juancito himself; and that there should be no staring at him or standing about his place. Furthermore, there must be no talking on any subject within his hearing. Except for this care to keep silence when near him, all were to carry on their usual occupations as if he were not there.

That was all. It was said in few words and decisive tones. And when it was said, there were no replies. As the hearers dispersed there was a hum of wondering talk among them, but none questioned the chief. In a short time the buzz of tongues died out, and the daily life of the place moved along in its usual course. Since their *capitán* had said that this thing was to be, it would be. So, to their minds, there was little sense in continuing to marvel over it.

If I could have accepted the matter as calmly as they, I should have saved myself some useless fidgeting. But, now that the end of the long wait was at hand, the time dragged. And when the day was done I grew more impatient than ever; for when I made my sunset call at the palm house I was barred out.

THE spearman who always had let me pass now refused to let me enter. He was pleasant enough, but firm as a solidly set stone. Once more cursing Viejito, I withdrew, to spend a restless night in the *paragua*. Perhaps, I thought, the doctor had carried his drastic drugging too far and, at the last moment, found he had made not a new man but a corpse.

In the morning, though, this guess proved wrong. Once more I was allowed to pass the guard unhindered, and when I saw what lay beyond the door I smiled in relief. The weirdly tattered shape which had hung in the hammock was gone forever, and in its place was a peacefully sleeping white man.

From crown to soles he was clean-colored, without a touch of either black or gray. And his tint now was more natural than it had been yesterday, for the fishy whiteness had given way to a slightly yellow tinge underlaid by a faint flush of pink. Looking more closely, I found the yellow shade to be caused by oil, with which he had been completely anointed—and, probably, rubbed—by Viejito. When this should be all washed off, therefore, his skin would be that of a *blanco puro*—a pure-blooded white. I noticed, too, that he did not look quite so thin, and judged that his doctor now had begun to put nourishing broth into his starved stomach. Certainly his bones did not show so plainly. And his position was no longer strained, but that of one relaxed in comfortable rest.

These things I noticed first, before studying him in detail. Now, as my eyes rested on his face, I found something which disappointed me. I had thought every outward trace of the mad Black White had been removed, but this was not so. Although the skin of face and head was like that of his body, it still bore those long scars down the cheeks. They were much less plain than they had been, but they were there. And, now that I looked for them, I found them also on chest and shoulders. The black mark put on him by Juana had been taken off, but the slashes made by himself would go with him all through life.

A little longer I watched him, wondering how I should explain those scars to him. Then I asked Viejito—

"When shall this one awake?"

"*Mañana,*" he grunted.

"*Bien.*"

And I left, to wait as patiently as might be for tomorrow. And this time I was much more patient than I had been yesterday. There could be no further doubt that the crabbed old *médico* knew what he was doing. He had made this man white in nine days, as he predicted. If he wished to use this tenth day in strengthening him by food and rest he was acting wisely.

Through all that day and all that night there came no further move. At sunset, though, I found the man in the hammock looking far better, glowing with healthy warmth and color. But he still showed no sign of knowing where he was or what went on around him. The wizard was keeping his mind blank.

It still was asleep, that mind, when he was moved at dawn. I did not see the moving, for none told me that it was to be done at that time, and I did not go out until after breakfast, when the sun was an hour high. Then, stepping into the fresh morning, I found the people moving about as usual, but all looking toward the hut of the white man. And there he lay.

Near at hand stood Juancito, seeming to be merely idling, but watching his people and making sure that his recent orders were obeyed. He said nothing as I passed. Walking into the place, I found its tenant unconscious, but breathing like a man who has overslept and may awake at any moment. His expression was peaceful as that of a dreaming child.

All the oil had been removed from him. Under him and partly over him lay a light blanket; and on him were wrinkled, but whole, shirt and trousers of tough silky stuff, taken from his clothing bag. That bag, and the worn leather case, and the wide sun-helmet—everything he had first brought here, except rifle and cartridge belt—lay in their old places on a pole shelf overhead. All was ready but my own hammock, which I wished to have slung beside his, just as it used to be.

Beckoning Frasco, I ordered my net brought *pronto*. Then to Juancito I softly called—

"Soon?"

Glancing at the sun, he answered—

"*Sí.*"

So, when my *chinchorro* had been tied in its old place, I lolled back in it and waited, trying to keep calm but feeling my heart pounding fast. The time had come when we should learn whether the mind of this man was white or black—or red with fire and blood.

X

NOW, as I have told you before, señor, I make it my habit to tell no lies. The truth always suits me well enough, and those who do not like it may be damned. Yet there is no rule that does not need at some time to be broken. And now I was prepared to act, speak, and think not only one lie, but many.

For some time after entering the hut, though, the only lying I could do was in my hammock. An hour or two dragged along with nothing to watch except a sleeping man and the slow-moving Uaunanans. At length, in the increasing warmth of the day, I grew drowsy. So it happened that when the sleeper recovered consciousness he found his surroundings even more natural and peaceful than I had intended, for he caught me in a doze.

I was in the dreamy state which is neither sleep nor wakefulness, and only half aware of what went on, when I felt someone watching me. Lifting my lids, which had grown very heavy, I glanced at the next hammock. Then I came awake with a snap. The waiting was over. I was looking into a blue gaze as steady and unwinking as the muzzle of my own gun.

How long those eyes had been open I do not know; but I do not believe it had been more than a few seconds. For several heartbeats longer I lay still, looking straight back and trying to see what lay behind that stare; but I might as well have tried to tell what was in the magazine of a rifle by peering down its barrel. The man lay perfectly still, without the slightest change of expression.

I sat up, yawned, stretched, and grinned at him. And said I—

"*Buen' dia', amigo.* And how do you feel this fine morning? You are looking much better."

No answer. A little longer he lay with the same fixed stare. Then his eyes moved, slowly, to the poles overhead, and fastened themselves on the old baggage and the helmet. A queer, puzzled look came into his face. After a moment his head turned toward the *paragua.* For what seemed a very long time he gazed at the tribe-house, at the people passing by, and at Juancito, who stood regarding him as coolly as if he were a stump.

"You have been sick for a long time," I went on. "*Caramba,* I do not remember ever seeing a fever last as long as yours. And I will tell you truly, I had little hope of ever seeing you mend again. You are as hard to kill as a *danta*—a tapir."

His head moved back again, pausing for another look at the helmet up above. That big white hat seemed to perplex him more than anything else. But just then something came about which knocked hats and all else from his mind. A sudden cool breeze swept through the place, blowing on his hairless head. His eyes lifted, and one hand rose, rather weakly, to feel his strangely cold crown. As it touched his scalp he glanced at his wrist and forearm, from which the loose sleeve had fallen away. Then he jumped as if touched by hot iron.

Jerking the hand back, he stared at its clean white skin; lifted the other; then put both to his shirt-front, pulled the garment wide open, and lay as if turned to stone, looking at his body. His next movement was to kick off the blanket and gape at his bare feet, white as the rest of him. Finally he struggled up, got his legs over the edge, and sat there in the swaying net looking stunned, dizzy, and almost scared. When his eyes met mine again they were so dilated that they seemed all black, and wild as if he had been looking at some unearthly creature.

"Come, come!" I exclaimed sharply. "Lie down again! Let us have no more of that foolishness of tearing clothes or tumbling about. —— knows we have had enough of it. Your fever is gone now, so act sensibly."

I spoke as if my patience were worn out; as if he had given me trouble during a long sickness. But I did not put hand on him, or even move toward him as if to press him back in his bed. Nine years ago I had made that mistake and nearly paid for it with my life.

Then he spoke; or, rather, gasped.

"White!" he said. "I'm white!"

"Of course you are White," I retorted, pretending to misunderstand. "Who did you think you were?"

He gaped at me a second, then fell to grasping himself, clutching his legs, squeezing his arms, pinching his body, as if unable to believe that this was he. His eyes grew wilder. All at once he broke out, his voice rising to a scream:

"It's a lie! A lie, León! I'm black! Black as the soot of ——! A dead man—"

"Be still!" I yelled, so loudly that I drowned him out. "Shut your mouth, you idiot! Lie down and behave yourself! Oh, for the love of *Dios,* must we listen again to those fever-dreams of yours? I am so mortally weary of your senseless yowls that I would rather hear the bawling of a burro! Always yelling that you are black! You are white, I tell you! White, white, white! Now will you lie down, or must we bring the *médico* once more?"

This was not at all the easy way in which I had meant to handle him; but, now that he had started on the way toward violence, my roughness was more effective than soft words would have been. By the time I was through abusing him he was wordless, staring at me again, while his hands still gripped at his legs. I scowled at him as angrily as I could, and motioned for him to lie back. He did not obey.

Suddenly he stood up and once more eyed body and arms. Then, all at once, he staggered and dropped senseless.

I lifted him into his hammock, examined him, and saw that he had only fainted. Indians had gathered around the hut now—one could hardly expect them to keep their distance under such circumstances—and Juancito himself had come inside.

"*Es loco*," he grunted. "He is mad."

"But no," I disputed. "It is a shock to find himself suddenly white, as it was to become suddenly black. When he awakes again—we shall see."

He looked doubtful, but said no more. Soon he ordered the rest away, and we two alone remained watching. We did nothing to revive White, thinking it better to let him recover his senses unaided. After some time his eyes opened again. They rested on me, on Juancito, then on his own hand. He made no move to rise. The chief and I looked at him and at each other, and the *capitán* walked out with easier step.

For a while I kept silence, letting White look at himself without interruption. He seemed very weak now, and content to lie and wonder. At length he worked a hand once more to his head, and his eyes turned to me.

"We have had to cut off your hair in order to keep your head cool," I explained. "*Ajo*, you were hot as fire! But it will grow out; and if you will only be sensible you will gain your strength very quickly. And I tell you frankly that the sooner you leave this place the better for you. These people are weary of you."

At that his brows drew down, and a little of the quick and deadly temper of Black White showed in his face. But as I went on this look faded.

"You owe your life to them twice over," I added. "They have saved it for you by curing your sickness, the worst case of fever I ever saw. And the *capitán*, who had reason to kill you before this sickness came, has not done so. Therefore you are indebted to them as deeply as a man well can be. But you have tried their patience sorely, *amigo*, and when patience reaches its limit it snaps. So, now that you are on the mend, it will be best for you and for all of us if you depart as speedily as may be. I think you understand."

His blank expression showed that he did not understand at all—as was quite natural. But he was following my words closely, as I desired.

"But perhaps you have forgotten," I continued, walking slowly around to his other side and standing with my back to the *paragua*. "Before we came here I warned you that these sons of the Caribs do not take kindly to having a white man amuse himself with their maidens; that anything of that sort might easily lead to your death. Then I left you here while I went to the Merevari. And on my return I found that you had not gone down the Caura as you planned, but had remained here to enjoy the company of—a certain girl. And just as you became sick you said she had become tiresome—"

"Juana!" he broke in, his tone hoarse. In his tone and in his eyes was something of bitterness and more of sorrow. "Dead! Dead!"

"What? Dead? Humph! More senseless talk!" I scoffed. "Unless you mean that the feeling she had for you is dead. That is true enough. And that is the largest of several large reasons why you must leave—"

Now at this point came Juana herself—that is to say, Felipa. When I had walked to his other side I had made behind my back a signal upon which Juancito and I had agreed; and at once he had sent for the girl, ready inside the tribe-house. My ears were open backward as I talked, so that I heard her soft footfalls just before she reached me.

"—why you must leave before she lets her rancor— *Cra!* Here she is now!" I ended.

The girl had walked toward the foot of his hammock, where he could look straight at her; but she did not come too close, stopping outside the hut, about five *varas* from him. Now she stood there with head a little forward, watching him with a cold glitter in her eyes, and on her lips a hateful half-smile. Anger, contempt, and malice all were plain in her face. And she was not acting. Her feeling was real, for she was facing the man who, she believed, had killed her father. And that man, half rising in his *chinchorro*, stared back at her as if disbelieving his eyes for the second time that morning.

Juancito now came quietly up to stand beside her. She glanced at him; then said, in that hard tone of hers:

"The animal's eyes open again. What now, *padre mio?*"

The *capitán* grunted, his own face none too pleasant. He had never had any love for this man. Felipa looked again at White.

"BEAST!" she spat. And with that she turned from him and went back to the *paragua*. Even her step and her back spoke hate and scorn.

White's eyes followed her all the way to the little dark doorway and continued to stare at the opening after she had disappeared. Once he moved as if to get out of the hammock, but did not. At last he fell back, put both hands over his eyes, and rubbed them slowly up and down.

"You see," I said. "When one tires of a woman it is well to go before she also tires. When both are weary it becomes very unpleasant. Now that you have seen, I think you understand fully."

Nothing more was said for some time. His hands remained over his eyes, as if to shut out everything around him and let him see more plainly things blurred in memory. At last those hands moved once more up over the bald head. In a low tone he asked:

"How long have I been here?"

"It is now late in October," I told him.

He was quiet a minute, reckoning.

"Good ——!" he muttered. "Six months?"

At that I nearly let loose a shout of joyous laughter. He believed it to be the same year in which he had come there. So it was clear that the black cloud of madness had lifted from his brain, at least for the time. So far, so good. But it also was clear that some—perhaps many—of the things which had come about during his madness still stuck in his memory, and that was not so good, unless he could be made to believe them only dreams.

"That is right," I answered. "A whole season of rain has come and gone. And a weary season it has been for all around you; for, *por Dios*, you have had the wildest notions! This dream that you were black, for one thing—it has tormented you all along, and the way you have yelled about it has worn on everybody. And then you had queer ideas that you were an Indian *capitán*, or something of the kind, with a band of warriors to follow you about, and that you fought fearful battles against all sorts of men—and devils too, no doubt." I laughed. "*Caramba*, if it had not been so tiresome it would have been funny! Here you were, ordering those imaginary men of yours about and killing enemies right and left, and all the time you were only squirming around in your hammock. Ha, ha! If you had really done the things you dreamed you were doing, you now would be the only man left alive in all Venezuela!

"But it was this foolish squirming and squalling of yours, *hombre*, that held you sick so long; it kept you heated and full of fever; and each time when you seemed to be improving you would fight yourself back into the same condition. You could not help it, of course. You have had what we call *fiebre de Guayana*—the Guayana fever—a most peculiar disease that sometimes seizes men in these mountains, and almost always kills them in the end. The man who has it lives in a sort of land of nightmares. And I warn you frankly, *amigo*, that if any of your nightmares still linger in your mind the worst thing you can do is to think about them. If you do so you may throw yourself back into the fever, and if you do that you will die. The old *médico* who pulled you through this time can not do it again, for he is worn out. So, if you have any sense and any power of will, put your thoughts on the things of your United States and keep them there. Then these foolish fancies will soon fade out and all your sickness will be gone. Remember—if you will not do this, you die!"

This last I said very earnestly, for I believed it true. If he should let himself go mad again there could be no cure but death.

As I finished, he continued watching me a minute, then turned his gaze up to that old helmet of his. His mouth drew tight, and his jaw took on a determined set. After a moment he spoke again—through his teeth, but in the half-joking tone of the old-time White, and with the first smile of nine years in his eyes.

"Right, Doc Loco! Have you got a cigaret?"

XI

NOW I suppose that in all the time of his madness Black White had not smoked; for in those highlands very little tobacco grows, and a restless madman would hardly have the forethought to supply himself with it. At any rate, the *cigarrillo* of black tobacco and *tabari* bark which I now gave him soon made him sick. So we did not talk much longer that morning.

I gladly gave it to him, forgetting what it might do to one in his condition; and I made another for myself. He coughed over the first puff, but inhaled the second with every sign of relish. Then he repeated—

"Six months!"

"Six long months," I nodded. "And, believe me, friend, it is a marvel that you lived through them. These months of rain are the worst of the year; a time when well men die, not when sick men get well. I myself have had my bad days."

"You look it," he said. "Five years older!"

That disturbed me a little. His eyes were sharper than I wished.

"You are not so young yourself, baldhead!" I retorted, as if half vexed. "And if you had been out in the rubber forest with me all this time you would look older yet."

He gave me a puzzled look, and I explained.

"I have not been sitting here and holding your hand all these months, *hombre.*" I grinned at him. "I am not on this river for that. The wet months are my harvest time, and I have been gathering my harvest many miles from here. I have kept myself informed about you by questioning the Indians and by coming here several times to look at you."

"Oh. —— decent of you to bother."

"Oh, no. Merely curiosity."

We puffed a couple of times. He passed his free hand along his cheeks, and his eyes moved about as if seeking something.

"Where's my mirror?" he wondered.

Either my gibe at his appearance or the feel of the stubble on his jaw had made him wish to see himself. I was not yet ready to let him do so; in fact, I had made sure that no glass was in his baggage. But I looked around as if trying to find one, then shrugged and took another draw of smoke.

"Somewhere or other," I answered. "I am too lazy to hunt for it just now. Wait and let your hair grow."

He made no reply; but a frown came on his forehead—a wrinkling of the brow as if he tried to recall something clearly. Watching him, I remembered the last time he had looked into a glass; the long-ago morning when Juana, hard-eyed, had put into his hand the reflector that showed him his sooty face. That sight had broken his brain. Was that what was now coming back into his mind?

I began talking quickly about other things—just what, I do not know. He took several more puffs at that strong *cigarrillo,* and began to blink dizzily. His mouth, too, became set, and he paled. The cigaret dropped. Suddenly his stomach heaved, and he forgot mirrors and all else.

"*Ajo!* I was a fool to give you that smoke so soon," I told him, when his spasm was over. "No more of them, *amigo,* until you are stronger. Now take a *siesta.*"

Exhausted, he fell asleep quickly. I walked out, grinning a little at the luck which had made him sick just at that moment, and feeling joyous over the success of my tricks thus far. Yet I was somewhat anxious, too. He was showing signs of remembering certain things too well, and it was altogether possible that my spider-web of lies might break too soon. It would take only a little thing to knock a hole in that web. I must hold it together until I could get him out of here.

So thinking, I walked to Juancito, who still stood watching the sleeper. And said I:

"He is not mad, you see. But we must have care. His eyes are sharp. He sees that I am older. So do not stand too near him. And we shall change our plan about Felipa. Instead of coming often in the day, she shall come only once more, and after sunset."

To this he agreed. But to my next plan he did not agree at all.

"I shall take him down the river," I promised, "as soon as he can walk."

"Ugh-ugh!" he refused, in a growling tone.

"*Cómo?*" I demanded. "What do you mean?"

"He must stay. He must tell his *guerreros* to go. He must tell them never to come again."

I stared at him, amazed and angered. Nothing of this kind had been said before now. And to hold White here until his warriors came, to let him look into their faces and know he was their leader, would be to destroy all we had done. Any fool could see that. Yet it was plain that one of those unreasonable notions that come to Indians had fixed itself in the head of the *capitán.* And as I looked into his stubborn eyes I felt my spider-web shaking under me.

"Come here!" I ordered.

THE pair of us went into a shed where some women were shredding cassava roots, told them to go, and squatted to talk. For some time I tried to make him see sense. But he would not see more than this:

El Blanco was no longer *negro,* no longer *loco;* he had no more use for his *guerreros;* so he must wait here until those fighters came, command them to do no harm, and bid them remain away thereafter.

"But do you not see," I protested, "that with those men at hand he will know our trickery and be angered by it? That his anger may make him suddenly *loco* once more? And that then he may kill you all?"

No, he did not see that; he would not see it. He saw only what was in his mind. I suspected that he now was troubled by his action in sending killers after the messengers of Black White, and so was determined to use White himself as a shield against vengeance.

"You are a fool!" I told him. "There is only one sensible thing to do, and you shall do it. When the *guerreros* come you shall tell them this tale:

"Juana died of fever; El Blanco Negro killed Sabio, the wise man, because he had not cured her; then he went away in a canoe; you do not know where he is. You will say nothing about his becoming white. You will say his two men went with him. Make all your people tell the same tale. The *guerreros* will go to seek him. When they tire of hunting they will think he and his men were drowned in the *raudales.* Uaunana will be safe."

"Ugh-ugh! They will say we killed him. So they will kill us."

His tone was as certain as if he said night would come. And something about his look and manner made me bite back another impatient retort and study him a minute. Usually the quiet little fellow had good courage, showed good sense, and had good reasons for all his ideas. What was his reason for this surety that White's followers would be hostile?

"Some one has been speaking black words in your ear," I guessed. "Who?"

He did not reply. But his eyes moved. Moving mine in the same direction, I saw, standing too far away to hear us but watching us intently, the grim-faced young Sabito. Sabito, son of the dead doctor, knowing his father's secrets, now would be the *médico* of Uaunana, and thus the most powerful man next to Juancito. Whatever he said would be listened to by the chief. He had an ugly temper. And he hated White.

"It is in my mind," I said slowly, "that a snake is here at Uaunana, hissing poisonous things to its *capitán;* that its tongue is forked by hate and speaks deceit for the sake of revenge. Its counsel is false and its heart evil. It wishes to bring about the destruction of El Blanco; perhaps, also, of Juancito, so that it can be *capitán* in his place."

At that the chief started as if stung by a real snake. And he peered toward the scowling Sabito with an expression most unpleasant. I was about to say more, but held it back and arose, leaving him to meditate on the thought I had given him.

"We shall talk another time," I added as I went out. "And remember that the counsel of Loco León has always been honest."

He remained where he was, his gaze resting coldly on Sabito. Toward that underhanded young man I walked. As I approached, he turned and slouched away. I let him go, for at that moment Frasco and Gil came to me from another direction; and, thinking they had something to say, I stopped to hear it. But they had no news; they thought perhaps I might want them.

"No, there is nothing," I told them. But then an idea came to me.

"Yes, there are two things. Keep watch of Sabito. And steal three paddles and hide them in the bush at the port. If any excitement arises come to me at once."

They grinned a little, as they usually do when they scent action. Leaving them, I went into the *paragua* and took from its peg my rifle. With this hanging carelessly at my side I strolled back to the hut, where I laid it on the overhead poles. It was quite as safe there, I felt, as within reach of certain Indians—especially Sabito.

Of Sabito I saw nothing more for the

time. Juancito, still squatting alone in the shed, watched me carry my gun into the house of the white men, but gave no sign of interest. White slept soundly. The sun slid on toward midday, and I remembered that Felipa had been told to come here again at that time, but had not been informed of the change in plan. So I called softly to the chief—

"Tell Felipa."

He arose deliberately and walked to the house. I did not see him again for hours.

The rest of that day was dull. At noon came an old woman bearing food and water, and I woke White to eat. There was food enough for three men, but I got little of it; for after the first mouthful he became a wolf. When nothing was left he lay back and slept once more. And I, still rather hungry but glad to see him building up his strength, took a lazy look around, saw nothing worth remaining awake for, and dozed away into a long *siesta* of my own.

It was only midafternoon when more food was brought. Since the Maquiritares do not eat at this time of day, I saw in this the hand of Viejito, still taking care of his new-made white man. The old fellow himself did not come near us; no doubt he was resting after his long vigils and gathering vigor for his journey back to his own river. Again White ate himself into heavy sleep. I remained awake, though idle, turning matters over in my head and looking at him. It seemed that I could see the hollows of his face filling in and the long body becoming stouter, as if the huge meals and the rest were making new flesh on him minute by minute. Probably this was only fancy; but I knew well that power was creeping back into him as steadily as water rises in a river when the flood begins, covering the rugged rocks and turning weak currents into a mighty flow. It is a marvelous thing, this way in which a healthy body can so speedily rebuild itself after privation; a lucky thing, too, for us who live in the wilds, since otherwise we should die much sooner than we do. There are times when even the luckiest of us become mere bags of bones.

And then came sunset and still another feast. When it was done the light was dim, fast shading into dark. And this time I kept my companion awake, talking to him—though he made no replies—and watching for Felipa. Just as it seemed that she would not come at all I saw her appear from the *paragua*, walking toward us with an air of insolence.

"Ah, here is your charming lady again, *compañero*," I said, with a sarcastic laugh. "Coming to keep you company through the night, perhaps. Shall I sleep elsewhere?"

HE MADE a gruff sound without words, turning over and raising himself a little way on his hands to see her better, but not sitting up. She came quite near, but not too near; stopping at a corner post, in the deep shadow of the low roof. On one arm she had brought a large bushy-tailed *marimundo* monkey, which lay on her breast like a baby, its arms around her neck and its queer face turned to us. I had not seen this beast before, and I gave her a questioning glance and a grin. Her teeth showed in a smile of malice.

"*Buen' noche'*, Juana," I greeted her. "Do you come to sit in the hammock of your man? And why do you bring your baby?"

"My man?" she sneered. "My monkey! I bring my new monkey to look at my old one."

A few seconds of silence followed. I looked at White, and he at her, unmoving, but with a hardening expression. As he did not speak, she went on with her taunts.

"Do you hear, *mono blanco*—white monkey? You are a beast that once amused me. That is all. That is all any *blanco* is. The women of my nation kept *blancos* as slaves. You are not strong enough to be slave. You are weak. You last only one moon. Then you are sick. You squirm and squeal about black face. You are puking sick monkey. You are no good. You think Juana is your woman? Huh! You are monkey in truth. The monkey thinks he is strong man—very big, handsome, loved by women, feared by men. But he is monkey, with guts of water. One Maquiritare girl ruins him in one moon. Ha ha ha! All Maquiritares laugh at him.

"See, Juana has new monkey; *marimundo*, real monkey of the forest, more handsome than you. He lies on my breast. He sleeps in my *chinchorro*. He is better pet than ten *blancos*. Look well at him. You see us no more. Juana will not come to you again. Juana will play with her new monkey. *Adios, mono blanco!*"

With another jeering laugh she turned

away. As she went, the *marimundo* put its head over her smooth shoulder and kept watching us.

Now this was not what I had meant her to say or do; it was meaner, more stinging, than I had planned. Moreover, although she still played her part of Juana very well, the vindictive mockery of tone was not that of Juana but of Felipa. And White, although reddening with anger, had listened in a keen way that made me think he was growing suspicious. Now he swung his feet to the ground and lurched out after her.

I sprang at him, catching him from behind, thrusting my knees against the backs of his, and so knocking his legs from under him. To her I snapped:

"Run, you fool! Run!"

She ran, scared by the unexpected rising of this killer. For a moment after my sudden attack he was a killer in truth, turning on me with face full of fury and hissing through his teeth as he tried to grip my throat. But I held my back-hold on him, knowing that his strength would fail. And speedily it did, leaving him so exhausted that when I released him he could hardly walk.

"And you are another fool," I panted then. "Lay hands on her and it would be the end of us. Remember she is the daughter of *el capitán!* And none here has any love for you—"

"Blah!" he snarled, glaring at me. "Shut up! That's not Juana! And you, —— you, I'll break your neck!"

I made no answer for a minute. Words failed me. I grabbed him again and shoved him to his hammock and in to it. Then, as coolly as I could, I said:

"You are wandering again. And I thought you had better sense than to let a spiteful woman disturb you. As for breaking my neck, you might pay a dear price for that. But perhaps I am a fool to meddle with fools, and I had best leave you here and let you destroy yourself in your own way. —— knows I have done all I can for you."

He muttered something, but was silent after that. Darkness came thick. I made a little fire which I meant to keep going through the night, and, when it was well built, lay down.

Some time went by, but neither of us slept. At length he spoke.

"What did she mean by saying white men had been slaves of women here?"

"I do not know, except that there is an old tale. White men—Spanish soldiers—had forts on the Caura more than a hundred years ago. The Indians destroyed everything in one night. And some say that certain soldiers, wounded but not killed, were saved by the Indian women and kept as their slaves. It may be true. At any rate, those men never came out again to the Orinoco." *

"Hm!" he grunted.

I said nothing more, nor did he. Finally, feeling that my spider-web was growing ragged but would hold together until morning, I fell asleep.

XII

THAT night, like others to follow, was not so peaceful as I had hoped. Neither man nor beast came near to disturb us, but phantoms did. They trooped through the brain of the sleeper beside me, making him toss and mutter and, at times, break out into the moaning cries of nightmare; and when I roused him he would start up and glare at me so wildly that I braced myself to grapple with him. But each time, after realizing where he was, he sank back without violence.

At first I was much concerned at the coming of these black ghosts to his mind, fearing that they might carry him back into madness. But then I realized that, through awaking each time to find them only dreams, he might come the more readily to believe that the real memories of his wild years were only the fever-fancies I had called them. So thereafter I played my game along that line, partly scolding, partly joking, and altogether ridiculing the things which I believed to be clinging inside his head. Then I would talk on until I led his thoughts to other matters, and presently he would quietly doze off into fresh slumber.

Because of these repeated breaks in our rest, morning found us both sluggish; and after eating a huge breakfast and drinking heavily of water he drowsed away into another long nap. This time, with the shadows of the dark hours driven from his head by the bright sun and the sight of people moving about, he slept untroubled. While he lay thus, and while I loafed and told myself I must presently look up Juancito, the chief himself came around the *paragua* wall; and with him, squinting in that half-blind way of his, appeared the Little Old One. Straight to us they walked, to stop beside White. Without touching him, Viejito stood for minutes slowly looking him all over.

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* True.

"Bad spirits have troubled him in the night," I said softly. "Now he rests from his fights with them."

"Mm," grunted Viejito, in a satisfied way.

And he departed. I never saw him after that.

The chief lingered, looking at the sleeper as if only half seeing him and thinking deeply. After a while I asked him:

"Are the ears of Juancito still full of snake hissings? Or does he now hear the counsel of León?"

His answer, when it came, was not encouraging.

"It shall be as I have said."

With that he walked away. I started to go after him, intending to argue the matter further at a distance from the hut—although there was little sense in arguing with him when his mind was set. But then I spied Frasco standing at one side and looking as if he wished to speak to me. So I turned to my man and let the *capitán* go.

"Sabito makes talk," Frasco told me. "He says Juancito does not do right. He says El Blanco should not be white. He says a man once made Maquiritare should stay Maquiritare. He says El Blanco must be made black again. He says the *guerreros* will not obey this new white man if he tells them to go."

"The fool! Does he wish El Blanco Negro again running mad here?"

"He says El Blanco now will do no harm if made *negro*. Sabito will make magic to keep him tame. El Blanco will do whatever Sabito commands."

"Ah! And when the *guerreros* have gone El Blanco will be killed?"

"No. He does not say so."

"Does he make this talk to the people, or to Juancito?"

"To the men. What he says to *el capitán* I do not know. They have had talk."

"And what say the men?"

"Some agree. Others not."

"So. What of the paddles?"

"Ready at the port."

"*Bueno!* Keep sharp watch."

And I left him, to return to my hammock and smoke and think. This Sabito was dangerous and crafty. There was not much doubt in my mind that he knew of certain drugs which would do the things he said—make White black, and hold him mentally powerless. I had seen that Viejito could keep his patient senseless through nine days of skin-changing. And I had heard of men who, though strong as bulls, were robbed of all will by some infernal jungle potion and thus made to obey any command given them. So it was altogether possible for this vindictive young *médico* to carry out the thing in his mind, if he could smuggle the drugs into White's body in food or drink. Thereby he would prove his magic to his people, making himself great among them for life. And in the end, with the danger of the *guerreros* out of the way, he undoubtedly would finish his revenge with some poison which would destroy White in horrible pain.

Yes, that would be the way of it. And was that, I wondered, what Juancito had just been turning over in his mind as he stood there? I did not believe he would consent to the murder of White, or that it had even been suggested to him; Sabito would be too cunning to show all his plan. Nor had the chief given any sign of consenting to the rest of it. But he might be thinking of it as the easiest way out of his problem, even though it meant undoing what had been done for his dead Juana. Whether or not this was true, there was all the more reason for me to get White out of there at once. Yet I saw no way to attempt it before night.

It was Gil, the quiet *muchacho* who once before had shown me a way, who now let me know what I must do. About mid-morning I was walking softly up and down in the hut, still trying to work out some successful plan of action, when he came scuttling like a lizard among the bleached trunks and stumps below us—keeping himself down out of sight, but traveling fast. I stepped swiftly to the back of the place to meet him.

"*Guerreros!*" he panted. "*Los guerreros del Blanco Negro!*"

He jerked his head toward the forest at the left. I looked quickly in that direction, expecting to see those riflemen of White's already coming up the hill. But nothing new was yet in sight.

"Where?" I snapped.

"Near. Do we go to the *caño?*"

I looked at White, asleep; at the people calmly working or loafing; at the gun and bags above, ready and waiting. Yes, we must go to the *caño* and that canoe, and go at once.

"Run to the other side of the *paragua!*" I ordered. "Yell and jump about there as if *loco*. All will go to that side to look at you. Keep them there until you hear a shot. Then run to the port. Tell nobody that the *guerreros* come. *Vaya!*"

Never again shall I call Gil slow of wit. He began his acting at once. With a weird screech he plunged past me and went tearing to the tribe-house, where he began yelping like a toucan and, with zigzag gait, kept on around the wall until he was gone. Men, women, children, all stood a second or two staring at him, then trotted away to watch whatever he might do. Only one stayed behind—Frasco. Either because Gil gave him some word in passing, or because he smelled a trick, he turned to look at me. I beckoned, then snatched down the rifle and the bags. At that he came on the run.

White was awake now, roused by that unearthly scream. As he saw what I was doing he sprang up.

"What's the row?" he demanded.

"Indians coming—bad ones—to attack this place."

I threw both bags to Frasco, who, without question, went loping down toward the port with them.

"Take your sombrero and come!" I added, turning to cut the hammock lashings with my poniard. With a few quick movements I had both the nets under one arm and wheeled again to seize my gun. I found it in the hands of White.

THIS helmet now was on his bald head, tilted far to one side. His face was set in a fighting grin, his eyes gleaming as they swept about. His fists held my rifle ready for war. He stood steady as the house itself, no sign of weakness in his eager poise.

"Where?" he asked, looking around him for somebody to fight. Not a living thing now was in sight. From beyond the *paragua* came the muffled howls of Gil.

"Give me that gun!" I commanded.

"Like —— I will!" he answered, still grinning. "I'm using it. Run if you're afraid."

I did some quick thinking and fast lying.

"Stop posing and come! The *Indios* approach on the river. We go to meet them—drive them back."

"With beds and bags? Is that how you fight? he jeered.

"The current is strong and may carry us far down. If it does we can not come back for a day or two. Hurry, you idiot! Must we stand and argue while a fight waits?"

That fetched him. With an Indian-like grunt he swung toward the creek. I ran ahead, wondering how to get the rifle from him. I must have it to give Gil his signal. First, though, we must get ourselves down the path. So I led the way along the twisting track, and he followed with long, fast strides.

We left the clearing, entered the brush, slid down the slippery clay, and so were lost to the eyes of Uaunana. Frasco had thrown bag and case into a short dugout. Now he was gone from sight, but we heard him in the bush seeking the paddles. I tossed the hammocks into the curial and turned quickly, hoping to catch White off guard and snatch the gun. But he had stopped beyond my reach. He seemed listening to something up the hill, whence we had just come.

For a moment I too listened, hearing only Frasco's rustling movements. Suddenly down the bush-lined path dashed a man with bow and arrow. At sight of us he dug in his heels. After a slip and slide, he came to a standstill. The instant he caught his balance he let the arrow fly at White.

He was Sabito. Whether he had suspected trickery in the work of Gil, or whether he had caught sight of us escaping, I do not know. But there he was, face poisonous, and shooting to kill.

White moved like a flash. At first sight of the Uaunana man he had stood easily, probably thinking this was the first of a stream of men running to take canoes and go to fight their enemies on the river. So the arrow almost got him. But not quite. He must have jumped aside just as the bow loosed. It all took place so fast that I could not see it clearly. But my rifle jumped and banged and Sabito doubled over, hands going to his stomach. Then he pitched down the slope, kicking, clawing, tumbling almost to the feet of the man he had tried to slay. And there he lay squirming, his eyes still hot with hate.

My gun dropped. Snarling like a maddened *tigre*, White sprang on him with hands empty, to choke and twist and break his neck. It was soon over. Sabito kicked a few times, then lay limp.

Slowly White arose, still watching his dead enemy, while his breath whistled through his teeth. I stepped forward and seized my rifle. Frasco had sprung from the bush and stood watching with a hard grin. He had not liked Sabito.

"A good piece of work, White," I said. "That man was a snake. Now let us—"

There I stopped. Another Indian came leaping down, and with a growling cry White plunged to meet him, hands reaching for a throat-hold. The man, panting from a fast run, gave a hoarse croak and tried to stop himself, but slid on. I, too, made a noise in my throat and jumped forward. The Indian was Gil, who had heard the shot and come to me.

"Stop!" I yelled. "That is my man—"

"Arrrh!" growled the killer, mad with fight; and his hands closed like a trap on poor Gil's neck.

I wasted no more time on words. A sidewise swing of my rifle caught him over one ear and knocked him senseless.

Gil squirmed aside, gasped a few seconds, and got up. I gave quick orders. Frasco and Gil lifted White and carried him to the canoe. Then they plunged into the bush, bringing back with them not only the paddles but a bow, arrows, and a machete. I picked up White's fallen helmet. The three of us got aboard and shoved out and away.

And so we left Uaunana; Frasco and Gil paddling hard down the *caño* to the swift river, while I, in the stern, steered and paddled by turns; White lying sprawled in the middle on the baggage and bedding, knowing nothing of what he had just done or where he was going. Up on the hill the people now were either running about in search for us or anxiously watching the dreaded Thirty Gang come filing up out of the woods. In a little while, no doubt, both the tribesmen and the warriors would be hunting for sign of the vanished Blanco Negro. And down at the port they would find it; a farewell token to schemers, and a last example to the *guerreros* of the handiwork of their master—the broken, bloody thing which had been Sabito.

XIII

FROM the port to the mouth of the *caño* the distance could not have been more than a hundred *varas;* and in no time at all we shot out of the creek and in to the racing current of the flooded Ventuari. Then it seemed that a mighty hand seized our curial and heaved it headlong down the curving course of the river. In a few minutes we were half a mile away; and, as my men caught their second wind and settled down to the sharp, swift stroke which they could hold hour after hour, we fairly flew.

I paddled no more now, for I needed my strength and time for steering. It is a rocky old river, even in its time of greatest depth; and, speeding as we were, it would have taken only one forcible bump on some submerged stone to fling us all overboard, with little chance of escaping alive. Here and there, too, we came to small falls over which we must shoot, trusting to luck and quickness to save us from hitting any boulder below. At any other time we should have navigated those places with more caution. But now there could be no thought of anything but haste, for I had little doubt that other canoes, with more paddles than ours, would soon be coming in pursuit.

At first I kept glancing backward on each straight stretch, half expecting to see hard-faced warriors already overhauling us in a drive to free their captured *capitán.* As we drew farther away, however, I kept my attention turned forward, feeling more hope of keeping the lead. My thoughts, too, reached ahead, seeking ways of speed and stealth to dodge them altogether. White still lay like a dead man amidships, so that for the time I need not think about him. My blow had hit him hard; and, with his shallow new strength used up by the excitement of killing Sabito, he took a long time in reviving. So I was free to consider the first and worst obstacle we should meet—the deadly *raudal* of Monoblanco.

This big rapid, which curves around in horseshoe shape among the hills, is so fierce that nothing can go through it and live. The Indians avoid it by making a hard day's march over tall *cerros* cut up by deep ravines, along which crawl many creeks. This is an exhausting traverse, even in the dry time; and now, with the slippery clay slopes watersoaked and the *caños* flooded, it would be almost impossible for any but the strongest men. White was not yet strong enough to make it. Even if he were, it would be very slow work, and his gang would track us and run us down.

There was only one way for us to escape that gang. We must go through the *raudal.*

"Frasco!" I called. "We must ride Monoblanco."

Both men stopped paddling and looked back as if I had screamed insane nonsense.

"It can not be done," Frasco answered.

"It must be done. Paddle!"

They stroked again, but with less power. They were thinking hard. I said no more, knowing that if there was any possible way to pass through that place they would find it. After some time they began talking to each other in their own tongue. Finally Frasco said—

"We can not ride, but the curial may."

"*Cómo?*"

"Men sometimes pass a canoe through by rope. We have rope."

"*Bueno!*" I rejoiced. For the first time I noticed that this canoe, unlike most Indian dugouts, had a long *chiquechique* cable at its prow. Frasco had taken the best boat at Uaunana.

"Where is the course?" I added.

"The right shore."

"*Bien. Vamos!*"

We picked up speed. And not another word was said until we reached the upper port at Monoblanco, where begins the overland trail.

ORDINARILY it takes four hours to reach that port from Uaunana. But so stiff now was the current, and so rapid our paddling, that we made it in less than two. In the meantime White came back to life. He lifted himself on his elbows, stared dizzily around, became more dizzy as he watched the banks reel past, and sank back. His hands went to his aching head. When he felt somewhat better he changed position and scowled at me, but said nothing at all. Nor did he move again until we went ashore.

"Now, *amigo,*" said I, "let us be sensible. The Indians behind were too many for us; I have few cartridges; so we are on the dodge. They are after us. To try to fight them would be the act of fools. We are at the Rapid of the White Monkey, and we are going to pass it by traveling along the shore. Both my men must work with the curial. We shall carry the other things. Now let us be going."

Frasco and Gil already were gone, working the canoe down the shore by the rope. White made no answer. He was pale, and looked sick, perhaps from headache. After fingering the lump over his ear, adjusting his helmet, and regarding me coldly, he moved with languid step to his case and bag. I, with hammocks, paddles, and weapons, started along through the shore growth. It was thick and tangled, but in it I found little wandering pathways, perhaps made by animals; and by these I worked onward as fast as I could. Behind came White, glumly following my tracks, and stopping now and then to rest.

The ground, sloping to the river, became more and more steep. The river itself grumbled, then growled, then hissed and roared. Through the tangle we caught glimpses of raving white waters, and the spray-soaked trees and brush dripped as if a shower had just passed. The footing grew steadily worse, the slant becoming steeper at every rod, so that at length we seemed crawling along the side of a tree-grown wall, with the lashing water almost under us. Progress was slow; every step had to be taken with care, and the leg-strain was most wearisome. Yet somehow we held our balance and kept creeping onward without a fall. Of Frasco and Gil we neither saw nor heard any sign. For all we knew, both they and the canoe might be far down the river, snatched away and broken in the wild waters.

How long that circuit of the horseshoe took us I do not know. It seemed all day. Yet the sun, though considerably farther to the west, still was high in the sky when the uproar lay behind us and a calling voice sounded ahead. I answered, and through the bush came Gil to get the paddles and lead us to the canoe. It lay in a quiet little cove, wet and bearing fresh scratches from rocks, but sound. The Indians too were wet and scratched, and their hard palms were worn almost raw from rope-rubbing. But they were grinning and ready to go on, and we white men were glad enough to ride once more.

I was as tired as I care to be, and infernally hungry besides. As for White, it was only his stubborn will that brought him and his bags to the end of that difficult journey. When he reached the canoe he was staggering and stumbling, but his jaw was set like a rock and his hands so firmly clinched on the straps of his burdens that he could not at once relax them. He would have saved himself much strain if he had abandoned that baggage a long way back. But it simply was not in the man to quit what he had begun.

As soon as we were in the canoe again, however, he went limp all over. And before we had gone half a mile he was sound asleep, lying along the watery bottom with head on arm and helmet over face. All the rest of the afternoon he lay there in the blazing sun without moving. If I had not thrown his close-woven Maquiritare hammock over him, his new skin would have become blistered.

We traveled now with easier strokes, letting the current do more of our work; for the Indians were tired from their battle with the crazy waters of the *raudal*, and we all knew that any men following us would be badly slowed up by that same rapid. First they would try to trail us along the usual hill path; then, finding no tracks, cast about for them and finally return to the port. There would be argument. When they did find our true line of passage they could not follow it fast. All the same, we knew they would keep coming. So we kept going, shooting new *raudales* as we came to them, and swinging the paddles steadily in the quieter reaches.

Near sundown we swung into the mouth of a small *caño*, paddled up around a few short turns, and there, hidden in the bush, made camp. Frasco, with his bow, went hunting, to return at dark with a small *vaquido*—wild pig. Gil hung our two hammocks and built over them little roofs of plantain leaves, then found wood dry enough to burn. With matches from my rubber pouch I got a fire under way. White, hollow-eyed and hungry, lounged in his *chinchorro*, dumb as a stone, moodily watching the fire. He had not spoken a word since the killing of Sabito. Nor did he speak one that night.

When the meat was roasted we all ate until we could hold no more. As none of us had touched food since morning, we left very little of that pig. Full at last, I made a *cigarrillo* and offered it to White. He shook his head, lay down, and was still. So I smoked it myself, meanwhile thinking both backward and forward. And reviewing the things recently past, I quietly asked Gil—

"How came it that you saw the *guerreros?*"

"I did not," he told me. "I was down in the woods getting bark for *cigarrillos*. A man came. He was trying to run but had hurt his foot; he was tired and in much pain. He told me to run and tell *el capitán* the *guerreros* were coming. He stopped to rest and hold his foot. I ran to you."

"Well done! You shall have another knife, and much tobacco," I promised. And I thought again—as often before—how important small things may be. If that runner—who, without doubt, was one of the men posted by Juancito to watch for Black White's fighters—had not chanced to lame himself, and if Gil had not happened just then to be seeking cigaret bark, we should have been caught napping.

For a minute or two, before putting my mind again on the things of to-morrow, I wondered what Juancito had done when he found us gone. And I still do not know what took place at Uaunana, although I have learned from Indians that no killing came about. Quite likely the little chief was crafty enough to rid himself quickly of his dangerous visitors by saying that El Blanco had just gone and given them canoes and paddles to overtake him. At any rate they lost little time in starting after us.

Since there was little sense in wasting thought on the Uaunana people, however, I now looked again toward the next day's doings. And, having decided on what should be done, I did the only thing left for the time—went to sleep, with my rifle beside me in the hammock. Frasco and Gil, who had abandoned their hanging beds at the tribe-house, huddled together in the canoe to spend the night. By the fading firelight I noticed that Gil lay with the machete ready to his hand, and that Frasco kept his fingers curled about a *lancita*, or long-bladed big-game arrow. All three of us held ready such weapons as we had. And our precautions were not altogether against *tigre*, night-gliding boa, or stealthily-trailing *guerrero*. None of us was over-sure of the silent man in the other hammock.

XIV

HALF a dozen times that night I started from my rest, aroused by the uncanny noises of nightmare; but only once did I have to leave my bed. That was when White himself arose, still asleep but open-eyed and mumbling, and stepped toward the canoe with hands curved for that terrible throttling hold of his. All of us came up then, the Indians gripping their weapons, and I speaking gruffly to the sleepwalker. He stopped, stared at us in the dim light thrown by a half-moon overhead, and stood still for the time of a dozen long breaths; then, unspeaking, went back to his hammock. There he remained until daybreak.

Frasco, moving at the first light, killed a *lapa* and a monkey near camp; and when we had eaten these and the scraps of pig we departed. The river was empty. And in the hours of paddling that followed we saw no man outside our own curial. Yet we kept going at the fastest stroke my paddlers could maintain, making no stop to eat at noonday.

White, lounging on the hammock-roll, stayed silent, though no longer sleepy. He was the only one of us who took no interest in the things before or behind. What passed in his mind I could not guess, except by an occasional look or movement. At times his eyes met mine, and in them seemed to grow a cool contempt, as if he thought me a coward to run from anything when I had rifle and cartridges. At other times he looked long at the backs of his hands, as if still marveling at their whiteness; and then he would let his eyes rest on river or bush in an unseeing way, as a man does when studying something inside his own head. So far as the matters of Sabito and my blow were concerned, he apppeared to have forgotten them. Quite likely the whole affair was somewhat hazy to him now, and instead of giving any thought to it he was trying to work out the answers to many questions puzzling him. So we slid on and on with never a word.

About an hour past noon I swung the boat into another *caño;* a narrow, twisty, but deep and long stream which I knew to be uninhabited by anything human. Up this we labored for the next three hours. Then, where a brook-mouth and a little hill made a good camp spot, we landed. And there we stayed.

The canoe was drawn up the brook and tied a little way from its mouth. Frasco hunted and Gil made camp, as before. When our bellies once more were full of meat brought in by Frasco, we talked a little.

"Now what?" asked White.

"Now we stay here a day or two—perhaps longer—to rest," I answered. "We have almost reached my district of balata—it is on the second *caño* at the west from here, and we could have gone to it in the canoe—but for certain reasons I do not wish to appear there just yet. So—"

"Huh! Afraid those wild Indians will come and get you there?" he jeered.

"No. I am afraid they may come and get *you* there," I snapped, more truthfully than wisely. Then, seeing my mistake, I quickly covered it up. "You killed a man of Uaunana, and that means your death if the others can find you. And the place where they will expect to find you is at my camp. So we shall let them look for us there. When they have gone we shall walk overland to that place and make ourselves comfortable."

"Uh-huh. So you don't think the Uaunana outfit will get licked by the bunch you ran away from. Then what did you run for?"

He grinned mockingly, and I kicked myself for clumsy lying. But I thought of a reply.

"I let Indians do their own fighting. My business is gathering balata, not mixing in tribal raids. And that business was been badly neglected while I have been away. So I went while the going was good, as you North Americans say."

"Umph!" he grunted. "Look here, *hombre.* Were any other Indians coming when you ducked out? Or did you fake that stuff?"

"*Madre de Dios*, hear the man!" I snorted. "For what should I fake it? Indians were coming, and hard ones."

"Who?"

"That I can not tell you. Perhaps Guayciaros, perhaps Guaharibos."

"Umph. And why did you yank me out of there? Why not beat it and let me have my little scrap?"

"With my gun?" I grinned. "No, *hombre!* That gun goes where I go. And since you would not give it up I had to take you also."

That brought a little chuckle from him, followed by a frown.

"Where's my own gun?" he wondered.

"*Quién sabe?* I have not seen it."

"Some mutt stole it, probably. Hope he kills himself with it."

I made no answer to that, and he grew silent and thoughtful once more. Yet that little talk, short as it was, pleased me as much as if he had laughed and joked and sung for hours; for it not only reasurred me of his sanity—of which I had been somewhat doubtful since leaving Uaunana—but showed that he was believing most, if not all, of my statements. If he had not, he would have called me liar.

A little later I took Frasco aside and gave him instructions. Said I:

"Tomorrow you will go *por tierra* to the camp of balata. You will go secretly, keep hidden, and speak only to Caraqueño. You will tell him where I am. But you will tell him nothing of El Blanco. Say to him that if Indians with rifles come there, he is to know nothing about me except that I went to Uaunana and have not come back; he is to be anxious and ask them if I have died. When he is sure they have gone he is to send a runner here with the words, 'Hawks fly hungry.'

"Having done this, you will come straight back, bearing a load of cassava and plenty of matches. That is all. *Comprende?*"

"*Sí.*"

So we slept, and after breakfast Frasco went, and we three waited. And while we waited White discovered his scars.

It was a morning of hot sun and little breeze, and the air grew heavy and close. White rummaged in his clothes bag, laid out some garments much wrinkled but clean, pulled off the soiled things he wore, and waded into the cool little brook. I followed his example. For a minute or two we soused and splashed about like children, then, standing waist deep, fell to the work of a thorough bath. Suddenly White stiffened and stood staring down at his marked chest and shoulders.

"More of your fever foolishness," I said, pausing also. "Men tell me that you tore at yourself so that they had to tie your hands. If the old *médico* had not been good at healing such things you would be marked most grievously."

He shot one keen look at me, then scowled down at himself. His hands, burned red by yesterday's exposure, kept passing over the scars as if trying to wipe them off. Presently they slid up his neck and across his cheeks, now rough with fast-growing black bristles. Once more his eyes met mine, this time holding a question.

"Yes, you scratched your face also," I told him. "What possessed you I do not know, unless it was that black nightmare of yours. But it does not matter. Let your beard grow, and the marks will not be noticed."

There I lied again; for no beard could entirely cover those marks—they ran too high. But this he could learn later, when more used to his new appearance. Now I expected to see him lean over and try to mirror himself in the smooth water, or hear him ask for more details about his looks. Instead, he stood a minute with that absent expression, as if seeking something in the past; then resumed his bathing, showing no more interest in the scars.

"*Ajo!*" said I to myself. "You are a changed man in more ways than one, *amigo mio*. I can remember the time when a mosquito bite on your face was of more importance than the death of men and the misery of women."

WHEN we had finished our bath we lay about, saying very little and dozing much, until sundown, when Frasco came trudging in. He bore a small basket of cassava, some coffee which was most welcome, and, as I soon learned, news even more welcome. Seeing me scowl at the light load—hardly enough for a day's meals—he grinned.

"Hawks fly hungry," said he.

"*Cómo?* Already?" I exclaimed.

"It is so."

And, when I walked away with him, he told me:

"They came last night. In the light of the moon they crept to your *casa* and rushed in. Then they entered the hut of Caraqueño. He was asleep. They threatened him. But finding he knew nothing about you, they did no harm. This morning they went all through the forest. They questioned all men. They hunted for sign of your coming. At last they held deep talk. Then they went away. Where they went is not known. They told no man why they came or where they went.

"They left just as I came, at the middle of the day. They went in canoes and did not see me. I talked secretly with Caraqueño. I told him you were here. I said nothing of El Blanco. I took food and came back.

"Caraqueño says you should come *pronto.* Unless you come soon there will be trouble. Work is done and men grumble for their pay. They want to go to their homes."

I nodded, for it was high time for those workmen yonder to be given their trade goods and sent away. This matter had been gnawing at me for days.

"*Es verdad,*" I said, thinking aloud rather than speaking to Frasco. "Yet that quick going of the bad ones may be only a trick. They may suddenly return."

Frasco gave me a curious look. Never before had he seen me hesitate and borrow trouble like a timid old woman. For that matter, neither he nor any other man had ever in the past known me to run and hide from any Indian band. Even more strange to his mind was the flight of El Blanco from the warriors whom he had so long controlled. And now, for the first time in the whole affair he asked a question.

"Why do you fear those men, *patrón?*"

I do not like to have a man of mine feel that I fear anything. And the question itself vexed me. So I answered snappishly, in an unguarded tone.

"Fool, I do not fear any man for myself. It is for the man with me that I am anxious. If those killers find him it will not be well. The reasons do not concern you. Let me hear no more idiotic questions!"

With that I turned sharply from him and walked away by myself, thinking. Presently, as I sat at the base of a *mora* tree and balanced matters in my head, a slow, easy step sounded near at hand, and up strolled White. I soon learned that my peppery reply to Frasco had been overheard.

"Say, *hombre,*" he drawled, in an amused way, "how much longer d'you think you have to play nurse to me? Next thing I know you'll be feeding me milk out of a bottle. What I'm pining for is raw meat! Bring on your killers, if you've got any, and I'll crack 'em in my teeth."

Those strong teeth grinned down at me, and he stretched his long arms overhead. Standing there in the misty half-dark, he seemed a giant, able to crush a dozen ordinary men at once.

"And if you haven't got any, let's go find some," he went on. Then, in a more serious tone— "Anyway, old chap, there's no sense in skulking. I appreciate what you've done and what you're trying to do—"

"Meaning?" I interrupted, wondering whether he had seen through my spider-web.

"Meaning you're trying to keep me tucked in my crib and shoo away the flies. Mighty decent of you. But I can swat my own bugs now."

"Oh," said I, feeling relieved. "Well, perhaps you are right. We shall start in the morning."

"Good!"

We walked back together. As we went, I told myself again that this was a changed man. In other days, anything done for him had brought no real appreciation; his only thanks had been conventional, empty words, spoken without feeling and instantly forgotten. Now words came slowly, as if he felt for them before speaking; but behind them sounded sincerity. Somewhere, somehow, he had learned something about being grateful.

So I told myself then. But before many hours I was to think otherwise—yes, and to wish that I had shoved this man into the roaring *raudal* of Monoblanco.

XV

THE overland march which Frasco had made twice between sunrise and sunset took us nearly all day to travel once. But Frasco had journeyed at a lope, whereas we tramped along at an easy gait, with a leisurely halt at midday. White found the pace easy enough, for he was stronger and the ground was much better than at the Monoblanco passage. Most of the way lay through open *sabana,* and, though we had to thread one forest and swim one *caño,* this was not hard. Yet when we reached my palm-walled hut he was quite willing to lie in his hammock awhile and rest.

I had told Frasco to take us to the clearing by unfrequented ways, and, as we drew near it, sent Gil ahead with an order to Caraqueño to disperse any Indians loitering around the place; for it had come to my mind that, since the workmen would soon be scattering in various directions, it would be as well to give them no tale to carry. And when we reached the opening we found in it only Gil and Caraqueño. That lanky fellow, grinning widely in welcome to me, looked curiously at my tall, sun-reddened companion, but asked no questions. He had not the least idea as to who this man was or where I had picked him up; and I gave no explanation. We entered my house, and as soon as the hammocks were hung the *muchachos* withdrew.

"Keep your mouths shut," I bade them in parting.

They grunted together and were gone to their own quarters. Then I turned to Caraqueño.

"All is well?" I questioned.

"Yes, now that you have come," he answered. "The *Indios* are very restless, and I have had to guard the trade goods to keep them from seizing their pay; but now there will be order. The boiling is finished; blocks are stored ready to ship; and I have kept close account of each man's produce since you left. So you need only add these to their tallies and pay off." He handed me a cord-bound roll of penciled slips of bark.

"*Bueno!*" I approved. I had not expected him to keep these records, and so had thought accounts would be in a snarl. "You have the makings of a balata dealer, *hombre.* I shall work on these tonight and begin making payments tomorrow. Now, what of those Indian gunmen who were here?"

He grinned again and shrugged.

"They did no harm. But, *cra*, they were most anxious to find you, *patrón!* And their eyes were full of thunder and blood."

He looked at me with a question plain on his face, but did not ask it.

"*Si,*" I said carelessly. "An Indian was killed in the mountains. It was necessary, but they do not like killings by white men. This is for your ear alone."

"Ah! *Si, señor.* It is forgotten."

"See to it that all *Indios* are kept at a distance from this *casa,*" I added. "That is all."

He went. Then, to White, I said:

"Now, *amigo*, I ask one favor of you: I ask you to allow none of the Indians here to see you. It is a matter of business. I have to rely on them for my labor supply. They are now sour because of delay in payments; and it may be that those visiting Indians dropped among them some word about you. If they see you a fight may start. In that case many will be hurt, and the thing will cause such bitterness that next year no workmen will come to me, and so I can not operate. But if you will remain inside this house until all are paid off and gone everything will go well. Will you do this for me?"

"Sure, if you put it that way. A lively riot would be a lot more interesting, but business is business." He yawned, changed position, and drowsed.

And I patted myself for my cleverness in holding together my web—not knowing that very soon, by blind foolishness, I should allow it to break and drop me into the clutch of Death.

A full hour of sun was left. So, moving my little table and a stool to the door, I fell to work at once on accounts. By the time Gil brought our suppers I had added all Caraqueño's slips to the regular records and was ready for final totals. And when the meal was past I lit the oil lantern which serves as my camp lamp and, with the burlap curtain drawn at the door to shut out mosquitoes and spying eyes, resumed my figuring.

White lay down again, and I thought him settled for the night. An hour or two passed, and, except for the hammering of some tree-frogs, all was quiet outside. Men were asleep. Glancing at the curtain while resting my eyes from figures, I saw cool moonlight shining through its coarse weave. Then I heard movement and turned to find White sitting up again. Something—perhaps the burning lantern—had made him restless.

"Would I ruin your business if I walked around the house?" he asked.

"Not at all, *amigo,*" I laughed. "All eyes are closed."

And I moved my table away from the door, giving him exit. He stooped through the cloth-hung opening and went out. Setting the table in the middle of the place, I went on with my work. Outside I heard his feet pass and repass, striding around the hut. The footfalls were soft and stealthy as the tread of a night-prowling *tigre.*

Now in departing for Uaunana I had left everything just as it happened to lie or hang, and on returning I had given no attention to the small things on the walls, for I had more important matters in mind. Nor did I give any thought to them now, for I was busy and my mind was at ease regarding White. He himself had not noticed those things, I suppose, because he was tired, the light was poor, and they were only such ordinary articles as any man might have around his camp. But now, when at last he stopped prowling and came in, a gleam of light from the farther wall caught his eye. It came from a little shaving-glass hanging on a peg and reflecting the lantern-shine.

Straight to that glass he walked, one hand running along his bristly jaw. Something suddenly tightened within me, and I half rose. Then I sank down again, saying to myself:

"Too late! Well, he must see himself soon, and it may as well be now."

THERE was a long, long minute of dead silence. He stared and stared. Suddenly he snatched the glass from its peg, turned, and stared again, the lantern light now full on him. As he saw himself more clearly he looked dazed. It was hardly strange. The face he remembered had been youthful, free from blemish, and marvelously fine of skin. The one he now saw was not only lined by years of rough life and marked by those long scars, but pocked from *zancudo* bites and coarser in texture. For, although the miracle of Viejito had restored to him his white skin, it had not restored also its extraordinary clearness. The years of burning by sun had made it too tough of grain ever to regain its silky smoothness, even after growing anew. And now, freshly reddened, and stubbled with black hairs, it looked even more coarse than it really was. The loss of all the hair from his head, too, changed him greatly, seeming to add more years to his true age. In all, the difference between what he always had seen and what he now saw was enough to give any man a shock.

"Not quite the same," I said quietly. "That infernal mountain fever has burned you almost into another man. And the Indians were not careful to keep the *zancudos* from you. But when hair and beard grow out and you have put on a little more weight you will look yourself once more."

He gave me a look so piercing that it seemed to stab through my mind, opening to the light the secret I hid there. But I kept up my appearance of unconcern. When he spoke, though, I tightened again inside.

"León," he said harshly, "you're lying! I'm older—years older! So are you! So was Juancito! Now come clean!"

"Bosh!" I scoffed. "Your sight has become poor. You need an eye-doctor and spectacles."

"Huh! What day, month, and year is this?"

"I have forgotten the day," I said, still speaking easily. "The month is October and the year 1916. Are you never going to rid yourself of foolish notions?"

With that I moved a hand wearily and put my eyes again on my figures, without seeing them at all. He stood very still. Presently he moved again. Looking up quickly, I found him stepping back to the wall. In a half-awake way he hung the glass where it had been, stared into it once more, and then let his eyes wander. All at once they became fixed on a small square of paper hanging only a foot away from the mirror. Then we both jumped.

That paper was a calendar of this year, given me by the merchants from whom I buy my supplies here in Bolívar. Fool that I was, I had not once thought of it. And at the top of the table of dates, plain to any man having eyes, was the line:

1925—OCTUBRE—1925

For a second longer he stood with gaze fastened to that damning line. In that second I sprang up. The lantern on the table, knocked over by my sudden start, fell to the floor. Its globe smashed and its light went out. The crash still was in my ears when there came a furious hiss from the dark and a great dim shape leaping at me.

"*Alto lá!*" I cried. "Listen to me—"

I got no further. Hands clutched me in a terrible grip, twisting and wrenching me so that my breath stopped short. I grappled, trying to fight back. It was the worst thing I could have done, for it maddened him still more. One of those hands clamped on my throat. I strangled, and my neck felt crushed off my shoulders.

In the darkness I now could see a fearful face, teeth glimmering white and eyes glowing green. And through the roaring in my ears sounded that horrible hissing, as if a huge *culebra de agua* were squeezing me to a pulp of broken bones. Flashes of flame shot before my sight. As things grew blurred I seemed to see again Sabito dying with a broken neck. And, feeling my own bones grate and life leaving me, I gave over fighting with my hands and fumbled for my poniard.

I drew it, but could not use it. A snaky arm slid around my own, fastening it to my body as if nailed there. The eyes in the mist seemed to grow into lamps, blazing with that hellish green flame. My legs went limp. I could move no more. Everything faded out in a mist of greenish black.

Very dully I felt myself falling and striking against something. Then I felt nothing more.

XVI

DARKNESS was around me, but light was before me, when I saw again. The dark was that of my house; the light was moonshine streaming through the doorway. The burlap curtain had been torn off. I was alone.

I lay partly doubled over against one wall, where I had fallen like a thrown sack of rubbish. And very much like rubbish I felt; weak and knocked out of shape. Yet, as my head cleared and my strength came back, I found nothing wrong with me except a lame neck and shaky knees. After looking about and seeing no man in the shadows, I got up and went outside. There I found only night and peace.

The clearing was empty of moving life. The little houses of Caraqueño and my Indian boys stood quiet under the moon, their owners still asleep, and not even a breeze rustling the dry edges of the palm thatches. Near at hand the tree-frogs rattled as usual, and farther off sounded the weepy whistle of a sloth. White had vanished. The only trace of his going was the burlap door-curtain, lying just outside.

I looked at the moon, and saw that only a short time could have passed since our struggle. Then I went back inside, found the lantern, relighted its naked wick, and looked around once more. On the floor lay my dagger, which I picked up. On its peg on the wall hung my rifle. From the poles drooped White's hammock, and in a corner were his bags and his helmet. He had plunged out into the forest without hat, bed, or weapons. He had not even a knife.

"Go and be ——!" I muttered. "And die out there as you may. I am done with you."

And I got out a bottle of rum, took a good drink, and rubbed my neck with the strong spirits. Thereafter I picked up the scattered papers, piled them in order, put out the light, and lay down. But it was long before I slept.

At first I cursed him and myself. Then I congratulated myself on the lucky chance that he had believed me dead when I was not. But as I thought on this, I began to feel that it was not chance; that he knew I was living when he threw me from him. Certainly it was not his way to make any mistake in killing a man. More and more I became convinced that I owed my life to a flash of memory, of decency, of gratitude—whatever you will—in the midst of his rage; that when he felt me turn limp he suddenly realized what I had done for him and what he was doing in return, and so had flung me down and rushed out to master himself in the savage solitude. And after a time I felt that, liar and fool as I was, I had suffered no more than I deserved.

For all that, I was in no forgiving temper; and I went to sleep with my poniard loose in its sheath and one ear open.

I might as well have left the dagger on the floor, for I found no use for it. Nothing entered the house in the night; and morning brought only Gil with breakfast, Caraqueño asking orders, and Indians gathering to receive their pay. Of White there was no sign. And for the rest of that day I gave no more thought to him, for I was busy paying off.

This was slow work, for now that I really was here and producing their rewards the workmen had lost their impatience, taking much time in deciding just what assortment of knives and beads, buttons and cloth, fish-hooks and matches and silver pieces and what-not would satisfy their desires. So it was sundown again when all accounts were squared and most of the men were gone. Some of them did not go that day, returning to their camps in the woods to sleep and start early the next morning. And some I had kept for work in boating the balata blocks down to my main *sitio*. These last, though, were Camani and Parú men, from down the river; so that tomorrow my camp would be cleared of all Maquiritares of the highlands.

Again I slept with an ear open; and again came only the usual night sounds. At daybreak I lay awhile looking soberly at the empty hammock, wondering where now was the man who had lain in it, how he was existing out there with no weapons but his hands—and whether, in truth, he still did exist. Most of the lameness was gone now from my neck, and most of the anger from my heart; and once more I found myself sorry for him. Almost I felt like taking such Indians as remained and trying to trail him and bring him back. But then, realizing the uselessness of this, I arose, took down that white net, folded it up, and cast it over his hat and bags, covering them from my sight. And then I put my mind on my business and kept it there.

An hour after sunrise not a mountain Maquiritare remained in my woods. In another hour the Camani and Parú men were at work on a job which was not to end for the next ten days—the carrying of my crop by *curial* and portage down to the great *raudal* of Equencua, and around the cataracts, and so to my home clearing. whence it could be shipped in river boats. And from that time onward little was spoken of, or even thought of, except this labor. I myself made several trips to the upper cataract and back again, while Caraqueño took care of the work from that point down. It was a time of toil and danger; and, at first, of wary watch on my part against another coming of the Thirty Gang.

It was on the third day that a crew of Camani men brought back to my *caño* an odd tale. These Camani men, by the way, were not of the Maquiritare nation, nor even distantly related to it; for their river flows out of the Piaroa country, and they seemed to be a mixture of Piaroas and Curachicanos; so that they had very little knowledge of the Thirty Gang, and still less of Black White. They said that when, late in the day, they were quietly pulling their canoe up among the shore eddies and nearing the mouth of the creek just below our own, they heard a deep, hard voice coming on the breeze from up ahead; and then they saw several canoes huddling together at the edge of the bank, with nobody in them. Dropping back a little way, they hid their own dugout in a bushy brook and stole along the shore to learn what men were above. And in a space among trees they saw a large band of warriors with guns, listening to a strange white man who had no gun, but who seemed to be commanding them like a great chief.

What he said the spies did not understand, for he spoke a tongue strange to them. But he was giving the warriors orders which they did not like. Finally one hard-faced Indian growled an answer that angered him, and, empty-handed as he was, he pounced on that one like a *tigre* on a wild pig; and he knocked him about until he lay senseless. And then he roared at the rest, and they flinched away from him; then they carried the senseless one to their canoes, and all got in and went away, up the river. And when they were gone from sight the white man turned, looking sad and weary now, and went back into the bush as if wandering without aim. And they saw him no more.

So I knew that White must have met his Thirty Gang. And, since they did not come to my camp, I knew he must have commanded them to leave me in peace. It was plain, too, that he had sent them from him forever.

As soon as I heard this tale—which was not as soon as I wished, for it was slow in coming to me—I went to that spot and sought sign. But a heavy rain-squall had passed over, washing away all trace. So I could only leave the wanderer to the mercy of the forest gods.

On the tenth night I sat for the last time in the camp. Only a half-day of work remained to be done, and by the next sunset the place would be abandoned. My personal articles all were packed ready to go down the river, and I was wondering what to do with those belonging to White; whether to carry them to my *sitio* or leave them here, where he could find them if ever he should come back. He must be dead, I told myself. How could a white man live out there ten days without a gun to kill his meat? Yet this was no ordinary white man; perhaps he lived, as his Indians would live, where any other white man must starve. But he could not exist in that way many days longer, that was sure. And would he ever return to this spot?

Outside the night lay black and dismal, without a moon; a night for all the evil things of darkness to prowl and slay. Time and again I heard stealthy steps in the near bush, and more than once I peered toward my hanging door, half minded to take the lantern and go out; but then the sounds told me that only animals moved there. At length there came, instead of sounds, a stillness—as if something were there on which all creatures turned their eyes, but which none dared to attack. Suddenly, but silently, the burlap moved aside. There stood White.

FOR a minute we looked at each other without word or move. I saw a man in rags, hollow of eye and pinched of face, with hair and beard half hiding all but brow, cheekbones, and nose. And the hair and beard were gray. So, too, was the face; gray with the pallor of hunger, under a tanned skin. But the eyes were steady and sane, watching me without either heat or hardness. And I knew that this gray man coming from the dark was master of himself.

"Come in," I said, as if he had been gone only an hour or so.

He came, moving with that same strange silence. I arose. His right hand came forward as if he were sure I would take it. And take it I did, gripping it quick and hard. His own grasp tightened until it hurt.

"I'm sorry," he said simply.

"My own fault," I responded. "Let us forget it."

With that I nodded toward the stool and took down the lantern. Out I went, to gather what food lay ready and bring it to him with my own hands. Returning, I found him leaning with elbows on the table, weary and weak, but looking at me as if the ache of hunger were of no consequence.

"León," he said quietly, "where have I been?"

"*Caramba!* Do you not know?" I set down the food and stared at him.

"No. I don't mean just these last few days—I haven't been far. But those years—those nine years! What did I do all that time?"

I eyed him in puzzlement. After a little silence he added:

"Things are blurred. You've lied to me—for my own good, no doubt. I know that. But I don't know what's false and what's real."

"See here, my friend," said I, "you have recently met certain *guerreros* and handled them as if they belonged to you. Did they not give you the answer to this question?"

"*Guerreros?* Oh, that tough bunch with guns? Why, no, they didn't tell me anything." He rubbed a hand over his gray hair, scowling as if thinking hard. "You know, that was a queer thing. I've been—oh—a little woozy lately. I ran on to that gang, and they wanted to come over and wipe out this camp and then have me go along with them. I wouldn't stand for it. Had to get a little rough. But the queer thing is that I knew them, and yet I didn't; and I could talk to them in their own lingo, but I can't remember a word of it now."

"Truly?"

"Truly."

I stood silent a little while, debating what I had best say to him. And then I said:

"*Bien.* It is true, my friend, that I have told you certain things not true. But I do not think those things are of consequence now. So why go into them? And since I admit that I have lied to you, of what use would it now be to tell you more things? You could not be sure of me. A man who has lied once may lie many more times. And, no matter whether I have told you truth or untruth, it is of no use to try to live over what is past. It is gone. You can not change it. But what is to come is another thing. You can make that whatever you will. Well, then, let us live for tomorrow."

He looked soberly at me. Then on his drawn lips came a strange smile.

"All right," he said. "Since both of you say so, we'll let it go at that."

"Both of us say so?" I echoed, puzzled.

"Yes. You and—Juana."

"Juana! But Juana is—" There I stopped short.

"I know." He nodded, and his face now was very serious. "Juana is—out there. She was with me just a little while ago. I think she's been with me several times these last few days. But this time I was sure of it."

I stared again at him; and somehow I began to feel a little chilly.

"That wasn't Juana we left at Uaunana," he went on. "That girl with the monkey—she was a fake. Juana is gone. But yet she isn't gone. She came and talked to me at sundown tonight. No, I didn't see her—but she was there. And she told me, 'What has been has been. It will not be again. Now go. Go back to León, and go back to your world.' And so I'm here."

His gaze and his voice were calm and certain. And, though at first I told myself that this thing was only the fancy of a man nearly starved and perhaps still a little crazed, as I looked into his eyes I became convinced that he spoke truth. Certainly he was not mad. And it was clear that something had come to him out yonder; something that moved him to send away his *guerreros;* something that had stood by him during ten days of wandering, keeping him alive, and finally had steadied him and brought him back. And the last counsel that this something had given him—in truth it did sound like the short, direct words of Juana.

"*Bien,*" said I, when I found my voice. "I am glad you have come. Now eat and rest, for tomorrow we go."

So he ate everything before him; I put up his hammock, and with little more talk we once more slept side by side. But before he would sleep he took the lantern to the water and washed off all his forest dirt, and threw away his rags, and came back naked and clean from top to toe. He found fresh clothing, put it on, and so lay down, with a long sigh of content. And somehow it seemed that this was more than an ordinary bath and change—as if he had washed off also all discomfort of mind and tossed away the tattered past with his jungle-torn rags.

"Good night, old chap," he said, with a grave smile.

"*Buen' noche', compañero*" I answered.

And I blew out the light.

XVII

IN THE days that followed we passed to my *sitio,* and from there—when the balata was reloaded into the cargo-boats—down the Ventuari to the Orinoco, and then down the *rio grande* itself. And during those days I found myself in company with a man different from the White of other days, the Black White of the nine years, and even the new White of the past month. A grave, quiet, thoughtful man was this, given to long silences and few words; a man, moreover, courteous and considerate; and, above all, patient. No matter what came about, he showed no bad temper, or even irritation; and that is more than I can say of myself, for there were times when discomforts and delays made me swear. Whenever he could be of help he did the needed thing and took pleasure in doing it, with no desire for thanks. Yes, far different was this man from the one who had gone up into the mountains so long ago.

As the days went on he became much different in appearance also. The gray hair and beard grew fast, becoming even more light in color as they lengthened; and, although they made him seem older, they also gave to him the look of a gentleman of distinction—a look which was borne out by his serious gaze and deliberation of movement and speech. Once, women had looked on him with love for his handsome face and strong body, but men had held him in no high esteem. Now both men and women would eye him with respect for his mature steadiness and strength of soul, feeling that here was one who had lived much and learned more. Even the half-hidden scars, which would have disfigured him if he had tried again to be youthful, now added something of character and experience to his gray-framed face. To my eye, at least, he had gained more than he had lost.

It was in those days, too, that he made a new name for himself. It was the only time after leaving the balata grounds that he spoke of what was past; for after that night when he cast his rags into the *caño* we both avoided the subject of those nine years. We were at my *sitio,* and, with my glass and scissors, he was shaping the growth of his beard. All at once he asked:

"I'm supposed to be dead, am I not? Has anybody inquired about me?"

"Yes," I answered. "Your people in North America made inquiry through the American Minister at Caracas, and when I was in Bolívar the governor asked me. I said that, so far as I knew, you were dead; and I have heard nothing more about the matter. Perhaps I did wrongly, for it may cause you trouble in proving who you are when you return."

"That's all right," he assured me. "There'll be no trouble at home. But how about Venezuela?"

"In Venezuela," I said, after a moment of thought, "you are a man who disappeared long ago—as many another man has disappeared in our wild lands. You are almost forgotten."

"But when I come back everybody will remember. And everybody from the governor down will want an explanation."

"Quite likely," I admitted.

"Well, then, as far as Venezuela's concerned, White doesn't come back. Until I'm out of the country, León, I'm—"

He gave another name, which does not matter now. And I, looking at him, agreed that it was a good one for all purposes. And so, from that time on, I called him by it.

So we came down the Orinoco, as I have said; a long and tedious journey, bumping through the easiest *raudales* and portaging around the worst ones; enduring the million mosquitoes of Maipures and Atures, and the roasting sun of the wider river below, and the—

Ajo! What in all *Infierno*—

Oh, it is you, White! *Valgame!* Have I not told you never to lay hand on me from behind? No? Ah, well, pardon me, *compañero!* It was but a touch on the shoulder, to be sure; but I am over-quick in jumping when something comes behind me so, and I forgot for the instant that I was in the city, not the forest. This is the Señor Seabury, of your own country, Señor—ah—Gray. An old friend of mine, yes. You will join us? No? Why, yes, I shall be up in time, most certainly. *Buen' noche'!*

Yes, Señor Seabury, that is the Señor Gray, of whom I spoke some time ago—the explorer from Brazil. He startles me most villainously—I did not hear him approach. Well, now, as I was saying—

What is that? I called him "White?" A slip of the tongue, señor. But no, I will be truthful, for I have your word; and I see that your eyes caught those scars above the gray beard. Yes, that is the Señor Gray, who once was Black White.

That is the new name he chose—Gray. And when I began this tale I meant to tell you so, but I changed my mind. You will pardon me? I felt that, after all, I should keep this from you, even though both he and I shall be gone from here. Yes, he sails early tomorrow on the *Delta*, which today brought you in. I shall say farewell to him then. And when the steamer has faded from sight toward the sea I shall hoist my sail and blow westward on the morning breeze. And that will be the end of a tale nine years long; for, unlike you, señor, neither Gray nor White will ever come back.

Nor will Black White ever come back. That madman, as I told you at the beginning, is dead; killed by old Viejito, and by one Loco León, and by something he met in the forest near my *caño* of balata. And somehow, señor, the wilds of Guayana will be very lonely to me for a time, now that he is gone. Yet I am glad that he is dead, and that in his place I can send back to the world a man strong and clean; a man who, for all his gray beard and lined face, still has before him the best years of a strong man's life. For he is not fifty, as you guessed; no, nor even forty. He is but thirty-six.

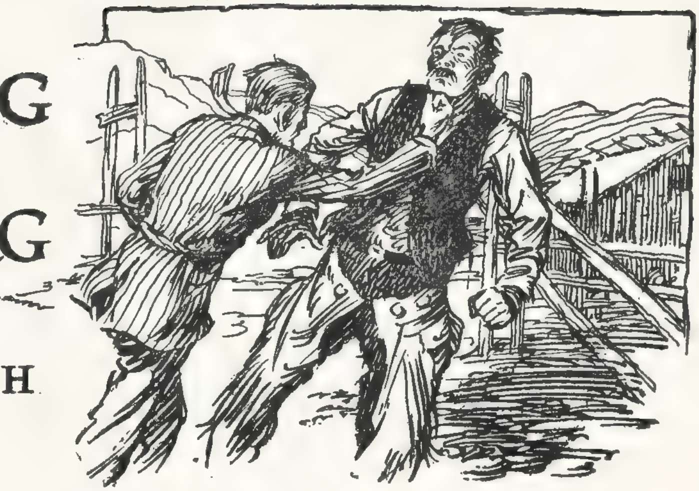
Yes, thirty-six. But his body has the vigor of twenty-five, his mind the power of twenty years more. The black dreams trouble him no longer, and he looks calmly forward to life, not backward. Yet there is something, too, that walks often in his brain and gives to his eyes a look gentle and far away. And I feel that deep in his mind, too deep ever to be entirely blotted out, lives the memory of the woman Juana; and that at times she rises again before him and counsels him wisely and well. I believe, too, that this really was what came to him in that last wandering of his at my *caño*, bringing him peace. And I am positive that if Juana can look back from beyond the grave she does not wish her man to suffer; and that if she still can reach him and guide him, the life he will live will be good.

And so he goes home. And to him, and to you, and to the Señor Davis who once sat with us here and now lies lost on the shore of the Caroní. I lift my glass once more in greeting and farewell.

Salud!

The TAMING of BILL McHARG

by JOHN JOSEPH



Author of "The Gun Fighter's Code," "The Smilin' Kid," etc.

I DON'T know how much there may be or not be in a name, but I do know that in the old days in the cow-country, if you met up with a puncher without a nickname, it was a pretty safe bet that the cuss was too dad-blame ornary for a white man to mingle with. Not but what many a bad *hombre* had a handy name, too, but this kind generally packed a good point of some sort to win 'em a friend or two, or a pat on the back now and then in a barroom. In fact a man had to be pretty much of a rotter if nobody ever had a good word for him, but as far as I ever could make out there was nothing about Bill McHarg to win him a pleasant look from anybody.

Bill had been wrestling with a job at the Star A ranch for four-five years when "Hap" Reed and me hit the outfit. In fact he'd got to be what you might call a fixture around the place—like the bunkhouse and corrals, you know. The boss, a square-shootin' plug named "Doc" Connors, had no more personal use for McHarg than anybody else; but Bill was sure a prime hand with stock, and willin' enough to take on the nasty work around a ranch—work you never hear anything about in the story-books, you know—so he stuck from year to year; and like enough he'd be there yet if Strap Seeley hadn't happened along.

Conners and his wife both called McHarg "William," and that made Hap and me plumb suspicious right on the start. Anyhow it didn't take us long to get wise that McHarg was just about the meanest *hombre* that ever forked a kiuse, and the only reason anybody ever called him Bill was because it wasn't quite so much of a mouthful as William.

Hap and me had been with Doc maybe six months when this Seeley person drifted in, and of course we knowed Bill pretty well by this time. He'd licked us both, for one thing, just like he always made it a point to lick every new man that come along, and he used to blow it around that no man could sleep in the Star A bunkhouse until after he'd been licked proper by Bill McHarg.

Bill's long suit was rough-and-tumble jungle stuff, and when it come to that sort of thing he was one of the kind you'll meet up with maybe two or three times in a lifetime of ramblin'. Five-foot ten andweighin' around two-twenty—all fighting man—Bill was fifty-six inches around the chest, without an ounce of fat in his system, and light on his feet as a lean bobcat. And the cuss didn't care a rap how they come. If two new men drifted in together he took 'em on double, which was what he done to Hap and me. If three happened along he took 'em all on at once, and licked 'em, too. If there was four he licked 'em two at a time, and as far back as the bunkhouse records went he'd never come out second best in maybe fifty fights at the Star A ranch.

Bill didn't care much about listenin' to his own voice rattle, so he never talked much; but after he'd break a new man in with a lickin' he always made it a point to corner the cuss in the bunkhouse after supper and tell him about the five men he'd killed around the country at one-time-another. He'd killed two more—so Doc Connors said—beat two Mex. skinners to death with a club down Texas way, and did a turn of six years in the pen for it, but Bill never speiled about that trick.

Nobody ever knew from Doc just why he took this "Strap" Seeley on, for he sure wasn't a cow-hand; but Doc was always doing something of the kind, and the answer generally was that the chap was broke. Doc was that kind, you know, and there was plenty more like him in the old days on the range. Anyhow Doc fetched Seeley in from the railroad one day, just in time for dinner. Because we already had one "dude" on the job we just had to call him the "New Dude" till we could hit on a better handle for him.

HE WAS a slim chap, this Strap Seeley, maybe twenty years old and weighin' around a hundred and forty; smooth-shaved, taffy-haired and freckled, and straight from the hill country of southeast Missouri, where little personal wrangles are generally settled with a long-bladed pocket knife. And I reckon he thought he had to have on a varnished shirt and collar before he could buy a railroad ticket. Anyhow he wearin' 'em both, and a pie-crust hat to boot, with a new pair of yellow gloves that must have weighed a pound apiece. There was a new cotton hand-me-down suit, too; ringed, streaked and striped like a circus zebra, and altogether the New Dude was something to look at and laugh.

It was along in March when the New Dude drifted in; it had been raining for a solid week, the corrals were three inches deep in slush, with ice underneath, and we'd sure been havin' a time of it gentlin' a lot of new saddle stock and getting the longhorns out into the hills. This was the first clear day and we was aimin' to make hay while the sun was shinin'; so after dinner we hustled out to the big corral to cut out some more saddle stuff, and of course the New Dude followed along to watch the show.

As usual Bill McHarg was the last to give it up, and when he whipped his hawse around to start for the barn, the pesky kiuse slipped on the ice below and went down like a ton of trouble. Bill's hat went off and he lit flat-side, all spraddled out in three inches of slushy corral dust. The hawse got two feet under him, then went down again, rollin' Bill's hat out flat and smashing Bill flat in the muck, and by the time the man got on to his feet he was sure a sight to make a catfish laugh. There wasn't a square inch on the cuss, includin' his hair, that wasn't fairly plastered. And mad? Man— Oh, man! That *hombre* was hot. Too mad even to swear out loud. Round and round he went, mumbling to himself and wiping the stuff out of his eyes, and finally he caught the hawse. Draggin' him into the barn, he yanked the saddle off and tied the kiuse up short, then he whirled to face the bunch.

"I'm aimin' to beat the —— to death!" he grits between his teeth, glarin' around and chewing at his mustache and hopin' that somebody would spill a grin. Speakin' for myself, it looked like a mighty poor time for hilarity, so I didn't have much trouble keepin' my face straight, and from the looks of the rest of 'em I judged they felt the same way about it.

Of course the hawse wasn't to blame—it was Bill's fault for not lookin' after his shoes, you know—but what does a a man like Bill McHarg care about a thing like that? What he wanted was something—anything he could hurt would do—anything to beat up and work the green bile out of his system. And like enough he was really aimin' to kill the poor —— of a hawse, for by the bunkhouse talk he'd already killed four-five—beat 'em to death or shot 'em—accordin' to whether he happened to have his gun along or not.

Anyhow Bill hot-footed it out to the blacksmith's scrap-iron pile and come chargin' back with a ten-pound bar of iron in his hand, and right then his eye dropped on to the New Dude, standin' just inside the stable door. I can see Bill McHarg yet, standin' there with his chin stuck out, glarin' at the stranger like he was aimin' to maybe brain him with that bar of iron. It sure looked bad for the chap, and I found myself wishin' for my gun and wonderin' if McHarg was crazy mad enough to kill that harmless tenderfoot on the spot.

Of course we all packed a six-shooter in the hills or when we took in the bright lights, but nobody went armed around the ranch, so there wasn't a gun in the crowd.

Just what to do about it I didn't know, and things moved so fast that I wouldn't have had time to do it anyhow.

McHarg was smooth-shaved and big in the jaw, with a hard mouth and plumb bad eye, and right now his hair was all matted down over his forehead and the tobacco juice droolin' down from the corners of his mouth, and on top of that the —— was mad enough to eat his boots. The New Dude just stood there and never said a word or made a move. Bill glared for a couple of breaths, then he found his voice.

"Grin, you maverick ——!" he rasped at the chap. "—— you! *I'll* give you something to grin about."

AT THAT, Bill dropped the bar: then he grabbed the stranger and jammed him up against the wall. Of course the kid was no more than a child in that crazy ——'s hands, but Bill didn't try to hurt the boy. All McHarg wanted was to muss up the kid's pretty clothes, so he just rubbed up against him and whirled him round against the wall and smeared his sleeves all over his face; then he slapped him and turned him loose.

Like a flash that Missourian's right hand flew to his pants pocket, but it come away empty, and right then I knew that the frog-sticker that was generally in that pocket had been left behind for some reason or other. The boy just stood there for a second or two, with the blood streamin' down his chin, glarin' back at McHarg, then he let loose a right swing straight to McHarg's big jaw. It was one peach of a smash, for a kid, and Bill went down like a shot pig. It did me a lot of good, for nobody but a sure enough cur would have done the trick McHarg had done. Maybe the kid did grin a bit, but how could he help it?

Of course McHarg was on his feet again in a second; then he went after the New Dude, with blood in his eye. It made me some hot under the collar, but there was nothing I could do about it, for a man don't tackle a grizzly bear with his bare hands. Not if he's got any sense. McHarg picked the kid up like a sack of meal and carried him kickin' through the door. Then he hunted the worst hole he could find and rolled the boy in the mire till there wasn't a clean spot left on him from his shoes to his hair.

Somehow the idea struck me right then that Bill was a coward at heart, and as it turned out I was right about it, for the time come when the bully showed a yellow streak a foot wide. Finally he let the kid up and stomped his pie-crust hat into the muck, then he stepped back to laugh. The boy rubbed some of the stuff off his face and out of his eyes; then he spoke for the first time.

"You win, mister," he said. Then, after lookin' McHarg square in the eye for a full half minute he let out two more words. "This time," he said, quiet and easy, just like that, and take it from me there was a lot of meanin' in what he said and the way he said it. I looked to see McHarg slap the boy to sleep, but something queer seemed to hit the bully, too. Anyhow, he turned without a word and struck out for the bunkhouse.

I knew the boy would be up against it for a change of clothes, for the little two-by-four grip he brought to the ranch was only good for a sack of Durham and a pair of socks or two, so I took him up to the bunkhouse and fitted him out with enough to do till he could take a bath and wash and dry his own outfit.

It kept on raining and the air was plumb raw, so after supper that night we built a good fire in the bunkhouse stove and gathered around to chew the fat as usual. I had met up with these Missouri backwoods chaps before, so I knew that nothing but blood ever settled a grudge with them, and my mind kept going back to that quick grab the New Dude had made at his pocket there in the barn, so it wasn't much of a surprize when he presently moped over to that canary bird grip and brought back one of them old-time Missouri frog-sticker pocket-knives. They don't have any regular back-spring, you know—just a catch to lock the blade shut and another to lock it open.

The New Dude set down again, then he gave the knife a queer little flip and the blade snapped open, with a sharp little click like cocking a shotgun, you know. McHarg was setting maybe four feet away, at the right of the kid, chewing his tobacco fast and watchin' the boy mighty sharp, and I got the idea that Bill would have felt just as comfortable if his six-shooter had been on his hip instead of hanging on the foot of his bunk, maybe ten feet away.

Now the kid had on an old pair of boots of mine, with the legs wore as slick as any man's razor strop from rubbin' up against saddle leather for a million miles—more or less—so he just throwed his left foot up over his right knee and begun to strop that knife on the slick side of the boot top. She was sure one wicked lookin' sticker, with a blade five inches long and a point like a needle, and it was a plumb caution the way that hombre *could* slap her on the leather. Back and forth—*snap-snap-snap*—faster than you could count 'em, and every now and then he'd look up through his eyebrows at McHarg. Not at his face, understand, but at his belly. There was dynamite in that look—take it from me—and everybody knew now that if the kid had had that knife along down there in the barn, McHarg would be layin' on his bunk now, with a blanket pulled up over his face, and Doc Connors would be on his way to town after the undertaker. And nobody knew it any better than Bill McHarg.

Finally the kid begun to talk, tellin' us all about his old home in the Missouri hills, and about his mother and sister and how he come to leave home, and all that sort of thing, you know. And all the time he kept strappin' that devilish knife—*snap-snap-snap*—just like that—and every little bit he'd glance over at McHarg's belly and give the frog-sticker a funny little twist—quick as lightning—with his wrist. I knew the chap's breed, and I looked every second to see him jump at McHarg and smear his insides all over the floor. The thing fairly made my scalp tingle. Things like that happen around a bunkhouse, you know. Chaps have a grudge to settle, and you never know when —— is going to break loose. Trouble might be only a second ahead, or maybe it might not come to a head for a week or a month, but soon or late the blood was sure to fly. It kept a fellow on edge, for he never knew when the ball would open up.

The New Dude kept right on talkin', like he was wound up for all night, and to listen to his easy-goin' drawl you'd think butter wouldn't melt in his mouth.

"Yes, sir," he goes on, "it shore seemed a right smart tough. No money and no good clo'se, and livin' on sow-belly and cawn-pone and sawgum molasses—seemed like a feller didn't have no chanct to ever amount to nothin' in a country like that, so I finally taken a sudden notion to hit for the West, thinkin' I might maybe work my way into the cattle business and be somebody.

"It took me might' nigh two years to save up eighty dollars, and it seemed like an awful lot of money; but I didn't have hardly enough clothes to wrop up a sore thumb, and the suit cost fifteen dollars, and some other clothes and some little debts I had to straighten up took fifteen more, and the ticket cost forty-two, and— Well, you know how it was. Anyhow, I was mighty nigh broke when I hit yore town, and I was shore glad when Mr. Connors give me a job."

McHarg kept a keen eye on the New Dude, every second, and I reckon that every time the kid glanced at his belly, McHarg was wonderin' how long it would be before the boy would figure his frog-sticker sharp enough for business. Finally the kid took to stringin' questions at us, and so kept it up for quite a spell, stroppin' away at the knife and throwin' a look at McHarg's belt buckle about twice every minute. At last he tried the blade on a hair, but it didn't seem to suit him, so he fetched a little oil whet-rock out of his pocket and give it a few licks on that, then he slapped it back on the bootleg again.

McHARG wasn't lookin' any too happy, but there wasn't really anything he could do about it. Of course he could have jumped for his gun, but the kid hadn't said a word to him; and McHarg knew well enough that if he did jump for his gun, the boy would never make a move, and that would leave McHarg lookin' as foolish as a man tryin' to knock his own shadow off the wall. And no man likes to make a fool of himself. I could see now that the boy had all the advantage, in a way, for McHarg didn't dare raise a hand without some excuse, and the kid wasn't aimin' to give him anything he could get hold of. On the other hand McHarg didn't know when the lightning was going to strike him. Another thing I noticed: McHarg didn't seem to have any call to tell the New Dude about the five men he'd killed in his time. That frog-sticker took all that out of the cuss.

Bill stood the pressure for maybe ten minutes more; then he made an excuse to get himself a drink of water from the bunkhouse bucket. Of course he stalled over that stunt as long as he could, then he strolled over and stretched out on his bunk where he could reach his gun, something I never saw him do before at that time in the evenin'. The New Dude showed the hint of a smile for a second, then he shut the knife and slipped it into his pocket. The tension eased up now, so we turned the meetin' into a gabfest for a couple of hours, then some of us split our blankets with the kid, and presently I blew out the light and we all piled into the bunks.

I was plumb nervous, for I knew these chaps from the New Dude's country never forget a grudge. It's the code back there that when a man does you dirt you've got to get even or lose your standin' among the folks around, and I was full of the idea that the kid was aimin' to split McHarg wide open sometime durin' the night.

Another thing: I was wonderin' what McHarg would do. I knew he'd figure the stranger just like I did, and I wondered what he'd do to protect himself durin' the night. Anyhow I felt that most anything might happen, so I slipped my gun out of the leather—on the sly—then I chucked her handy under the pillow.

I couldn't have gone to sleep if I'd wanted to—which I sure didn't—so I just laid there and listened sharp, and by-and-by she cleared up and the moon come out. I was aimin' to take a shot at somebody if there was any sneakin' tried on, and along about twelve I heard somebody movin'. I raised up a little and took a strangle holt on my gun, and about that time I made out McHarg fussin' around his bunk. I couldn't tell what he was doin', so I just watched, and after a while he quieted down again. I watched and listened for may be an hour, but nothing happened, and finally I dropped off to sleep.

It was just breakin' day when I woke up. I heard somebody movin' around, so I took a sly peep, and here it was Bill McHarg crawlin' out from under his bunk! Then I saw just how it was. Bill had made a roll out of part of his blankets and left them on top, then he took the rest and bedded himself down *under* the bunk. I come near laughin' right out in meetin'—thinkin' about man-eater McHarg sleepin' under his dad-blame bunk—all on account of a raw tenderfoot from way back East.

Next day Doc put the New Dude to work, and he sure surprized us all. You see, he'd been raised on a farm and rode hawses all his life, so it didn't take him long to get on to the ways of the broncs. Anyhow he showed right off that he was going to make good, and bein' a likable sort of chap with an easy smile, the boys give him a nickname and took him on as one of the bunch without any further ceremony. And that name come easy, too; all on account of Hap Reed referrin' to the New Dude as "that Missouri knife-strapper." Of course we shortened it to Strapper and from that to Strap, and the name stuck as long as ever I knew him.

Of course somebody spilled the beans to Doc about the row, and Doc took pains aplenty to lay out the work so that McHarg and Strap wouldn't need to mix it unless they wanted to; but I noticed that McHarg was packin' his gun next day all right, and I don't know as anybody could blame him.

THAT night it was the same thing over again at the bunkhouse, with the kid strappin' his pesky frog-sticker and eyein' McHarg's wishbone for maybe an hour, and finally Bill wilted and hit his bunk just like he did the first time. I wondered what was runnin' in McHarg's mind, for the kid hadn't said a word that Bill could get hold of, and at the same time the threat was there, a deadly threat that was enough to make a man's hair curl—when he looked at that knife. Bill slept under his bunk again that night, and next night it was the same thing over again, but on the fourth day when we came in from the hills McHarg was gone: He'd called for his time early in the mawnin', leavin' behind the best job he'd ever had in his life.

I didn't exactly understand what had been goin' on, but after supper Strap opened up and told us all about it. Or not quite all of it—as the thing finally turned out—but he did explain the knife strappin' stunt to the satisfaction of everybody.

"I'd of whittled him right there in the barn," he told us, "if I'd had my knife on me, but I didn't have it—for once—so I had time to sort of cool off by the time I had my supper. I'd have to whittle him sometime, of course, but I'd need a few dollars to make my get-away on, so I just planned it all out to wait till pay-day, then I was aimin' to whittle the —— and beat it. Just the same I wasn't aimin' to take any chances, so I doped out a scheme to throw the fear of God into the cur and put him in a frame of mind to leave me alone. Only trouble was I made it too strong, and now I've got to hunt him, and that's mighty apt to be a big job."

Shore enough, come pay-day, Strap Seeley called for his time and beat it. Hap Reed and me stuck it out till Fall, then we drifted down into New Mex for the Winter. Of course we rambled again in the Spring, and kept on goin', here and there for four-five years, and finally Hap got his leg broke and landed in the Sacramento hospital. Then I went out with a Miller & Lux outfit and drifted around four-five years more and never saw Hap again. Finally I dropped into Reno one time with a pretty nifty little roll I'd picked up playin' poker in Winnamuck. A couple of weeks high-life in Reno and the faro layouts had me clean again, and right then I run on to Strap Seeley once more. Strap had a few dollars on him and was headed for the Steen's Mountain country, so he put it up to me to hit the rails for Amidee and ramble out into the lava hills. I'd never been up that way, so I took him up and next mawnin' we hit the cushions for Amidee.

Of course I'd just about forgot all about old Bill McHarg by this time, but after the con. got our tickets Strap braced his feet up on the cushion ahead, and right then I took note of something that put me in mind of old times.

"Ever run on to old Bill McHarg?" I grinned at him, after a bit.

"Not yet!" he come back, short-like. I could see his jaw set tight, and I knew right now that he'd been huntin' McHarg every day since he left the old Star A ranch.

"I see you've still got the old frog-sticker," I put at him, with another grin.

"You could guess at that, of course," he come back.

"I ain't guessin'," says I.

Strap looked me over.

"How come?" says he, short-like again.

"Your boot-top," says I. "It's got a polish in it that a man could see his face in to shave by!"

Strap grinned, then he pulled the old sticker out and snapped her open. He looked it over for a minute and slapped it on the leather a time or two; then he pulled another knife exactly like it and snapped it open too. No two eggs ever looked nearer alike.

I didn't get the nub to the idea, so I didn't waste any time comin' through with a question.

"What the —— you want of two of 'em?" I asked him. "You'd ought to hire a nigger to pack 'em for you."

Strap smiled a bit crooked.

"If you happen to be around at the right time—and I shore hope you will—you'll see for yorese'f what I want of 'em," he come back. And that's all I could get out of him. There was a queer look in his face, and of course I done a lot of guessin'; but I never come within a mile of the truth, as I was to find out right soon.

We stopped that night in a four-bit lodgin' house in Amidee, and next mawnin' when we went down for a drink, Strap run on to a cattleman he'd worked for down South. He was the right kind, so he staked us to a couple of hawses and saddles, and before noon we were on the trail. We had a couple of jobs offered us in the lake country, but Strap had his neck bowed for a certain place in Steen's Mountains, and we finally landed a job there with a little outfit called the Van Buren ranch.

WE PULLED our leather off the kiuses along about four in the afternoon, then rambled up to the bunkhouse to wait for supper. It was a nifty evenin' late in August, and there was nobody around; so we set around and chewed the fat on a bench outside, and maybe about five o'clock a hawseman rode up from a big field across the road. He was a good two hundred yards away, but I knew in a second that it was Bill McHarg, in spite of a black beard and a big black mustache. Knew him by the way he set his hawse, by the way he wore his hat, by the swing of his six-gun—knew him just as well as if I'd been shakin' hands with him.

Strap knew him too, of course. I watched Strap, wonderin' what he would do. I saw his mouth take on a straight line and his jaw set right, and I got the idea that findin' McHarg here was no surprize to Strap Seeley.

"Bill McHarg," I said, when the hawseman swung down to open the gate.

"Yes," replied Strap, soft and easy, "it's shore McHarg. Wonder if he's comin' here? I thought I'd find him over at the Phillips ranch. Somebody maybe give me a wrong steer."

McHarg shut the gate and straddled his kiuse again, and I thought at first he was aimin' to take the road. He didn't, however, just rode across the road and through the other gate, which happened to be open, then he give his hawse the spurs and headed for the barn.

"He's movin' like he belonged here," says Strap, quick-like. "Let's get in out of sight."

At that he pulled his hat down over his eyes and stepped into the bunkhouse, with me right at his heels. There was nobody else around, so Strap slipped over to the window next the barn and watched McHarg stable his hawse.

"He's comin', Jack," he says, after a bit, turnin' to look sharp at me. "Stretch out on a bunk and let on like you're asleep. I'll put you wise later on."

I couldn't make out what he was aimin' to do, for he had no gun on him; but it was plain enough that he meant straight business, so I rolled on to a bunk and worked my six-gun around where I could get at her quick if there was any need for it. Strap watched for a minute, then whirled around and tip-toed in behind the open door. I could hear voices outside, so I knew there were some men along with McHarg.

Sure enough, four men presently stepped in, and the last one was Bill McHarg. Bill stopped just inside the door and glanced at me—I had one eye open a crack, of course—and right then Strap reached out from behind the door and snatched Bill's gun out of the holster. McHarg grabbed like a flash for the gun, whirlin' around as he did it, but he was a split second too late.

"STICK 'em up! All of you!" Strap barked, jumpin' back to cover the whole bunch. "Cover 'em, Jack," he added a second later, "I've got business with this black *hombre* here."

The men stuck 'em up, of course; then I jumped up and harvested their guns, and Strap turned to McHarg.

"Seems like I've seen you before—somewhere," says Strap, sort of sarcastic-like, lookin' McHarg over from hat to spurs.

And now I had my first good look at McHarg. Time had put its mark on him and he'd lost maybe a few pounds of weight, but he was still a hawse of a man for all that. His hair was a bit streaked with gray, but he was pretty much the same old Bill McHarg, only his eyes were different. He knew Strap Seeley, and the man was scared, but there was something else in his eyes—a sort of a hunted look that it took years to put there, and it was plain enough to me that the man had been lookin' for something like this to happen, every day and every hour since the time he beat it out from the old Star A ranch, nearly ten years back.

McHarg had nothing to say, just stared at Strap, and I could see his big face twitch like a man's face quivers when he's on the edge of the whisky Willies. Strap looked him over for a minute, then drove him out into the yard and followed him up.

"Bring the other guys out and line 'em up," he snapped back at me from the door.

I tossed the extra guns on a bunk, then drove the bunch out and lined 'em up beside the house. Strap drove McHarg back maybe thirty feet, then stopped him.

"Now, Mr. William McHarg," Strap rasped at him, still keepin' him covered, "you and me will settle that little muss you started ten years back—and didn't finish. You're plumb full of the idea that you're a bad Injun, and in yore own way I reckon you are. You've killed five men—by yore own account—and done six years for killin' two more that you don't blow so much about, and also I reckon you've beat up maybe a hundred. But you always picked yore own time and yore own way, and this time it is goin' to be a little different. I don't reckon you're goin' to like it much, but this is goin' to be one time when the other feller picks the tools and the time and the place. I'm aimin' to whittle yore —— guts out, my friend, and I'm goin' to do it strictly on the square, takin' no more advantage than you took yorese'f, a hundred times. Got anything to say for yorese'f?"

Still McHarg hadn't a word to say. Strap eyed him for a minute, then pulled out both of them frog-stickers and tossed 'em down at McHarg's feet, and I begun to see now what his idea was in packin' the two knives.

Strap was standin' maybe ten feet from McHarg:

"Take yore choice," he barked, when the knives hit the ground.

McHarg hesitated for a breath or two, but no matter how little stomach he had for the business, there was nothing to do but obey orders. He picked up both knives and opened 'em up and looked 'em over careful.

"Shut the one you don't want," Strap shot at him, "and toss her over here to me."

At last Bill shut one knife and tossed it down at Strap's feet, then he began strippin' off his shirt. Strap didn't seem to think he needed his shirt off, so he just reached down and picked up the knife, then gave it that little Missouri flip and the thing was ready for business.

Now your hill country knife-fighter don't hold his sticker like most of the pictures you see in the story books. He holds it like a sword, with his thumb next to the blade; and McHarg, when he got his shirt off, showed how green he was by grabbin' his knife the wrong way—that is, with the blade next to the heel of his hand, ready for an overhand stroke. It won't do—when you go up against a real knife expert—you can go bettin' on that.

It was the first time I ever had seen McHarg stripped to the waist, and I want to say right here that I never saw such a chest and arms, even in a show. Strap looked like an invalid beside him.. McHarg glared at Strap and I could see some of the scare go away and the old fightin' look come back. It scared me, too, for I knew what the man was when he got started. A million dollars wouldn't have hired me to face that beast with that razor-edge, needle-pointed knife in a hand that could drive it to the hilt in a sound tree. Just one drive, if he could land it, would cut Strap Seeley in two like a loaf of bread. Just for a breath I come dang near stickin' my own nose into the game.

Everything was all set, now, so Strap turned his head to toss his gun back on the ground behind him; and right then McHarg charged, aimin' to cut Strap in two while his back was turned. I whipped my gun up like a flash, but Strap beat me to it, otherwise McHarg's trail would have ended right there. Strap told me afterward that he expected McHarg to make exactly the play he did, and so laid his plans to fit that idea.

Anyhow Strap sidestepped—like the flash of a shadow, it was—just as McHarg, sure of his meat, ripped the knife down with force enough to drive it through a bull's skull. The miss threw McHarg off his balance, he rolled in the dust, and I'll never forget the look in his face when he scrambled to his feet. Strap could have knifed him in the back while he was getting up, but to my surprize, he never made a move. He just waited till McHarg got his balance, then whipped the knife like the strike of a rattler, and McHarg staggered back with an inch deep gash clean across his big, hairy chest. The blood fairly spurted.

Strap followed him up, with little short-arm jabs that brought more blood every time. McHarg kept going back, makin' a terrific swing every three-four steps; but Strap side-stepped every time and Bill's knife never once come within a foot of the mark. I forgot all about the fellows I was supposed to be riding herd on; so I followed the fighters up, tip-toe with my gun ready and every nerve tinglin'. Strap kept jabbing, and every jab left a trail of blood, and finally McHarg dropped his knife and run like a white-head. Strap could have run circles around the fool, but McHarg was too bad scared to know it. All he wanted right then was to get somewhere where there wasn't any blood-hungry knives and mad Missourians.

I stopped when McHarg started to run, and what beat me was that Strap never *tried* to kill the cuss. Just kept at his heels, proddin' him in the hind parts about every third step, with McHarg tearin' for the big gate at the road in front. At the gate Strap give McHarg a farewell kick and watched him run for awhile, then he come grinnin' back to where I was waitin' for him.

I NEVER saw another Injun as happy-lookin' as Strap Seeley. The other fellows looked just about as happy as Strap did, so I got the idea that they'd had their own troubles with McHarg and was glad enough to see the color of his blood and watch him kick up the dust in the big road. Anyhow, we all stood there grinnin' and watchin' the cuss run till he disappeared over a little hill maybe a quarter down the road, then Strap led the way to the bunkhouse. We all set down on the benches to roll us a smoke, and after a bit Strap give us the low down on the whole business.

"I hunted the —— for nearly ten years," he explained, "aimin' to whittle him—right—whenever I got him cornered. But when I looked the cuss over—through the window awhile ago—I just thought, 'Oh, ——! If I whittle him proper, his troubles will all be over, and maybe mine will be just beginnin'; so I'll trim him up a bit and let him spend the next ten years like he spent the last ten—expectin' me to show up most any old time and whittle him.' That's what I told him when I give him the boot; 'Just keep a-goin',' says I, 'for the next time I meet up with you I'm aimin' to whittle you plumb proper.' "

And I reckon Bill took Strap's advice, for the last I heard of him, the cuss was on board a boat headed for the Argentine.

DECORUM AND DECORATION

by Alanson Skinner

AMONG many Indian tribes of North America, especially those of the woodlands and plains, it is considered the greatest breach of etiquette possible for a man to speak to his mother-in-law under any conditions whatsoever. This custom is still retained among many of the more conservative tribes.

The tabu is the more irksome because in many cases the young couple come to the home of the girl's parents after marriage, to remain for some years. The tabu can be raised, in some tribes, by the son-in-law going to war and bringing back his trophies, such as scalps and horses as a present to his wife's mother. After this has been publicly announced, he may speak to her without fear of reproach. In other tribes the procedure is reversed, and the mother-in-law may remove the tabu by making a valuable present to her son-in-law.

Another interesting and widespread custom among the Indians is that of the "joking relationship." An Indian may not, as a rule, make free with all of his relatives, but he may go to any lengths with his uncle, aunt, nephew, niece and brothers- and sisters-in-law. The relationship of uncle and nephew is often regarded as even closer than that of father and son, and bears heavy obligations.

AMONG the Sauk, Menomini, Fox, Ioway, Oto, Osage, and Pawnee tribes in particular, the most valued insignia of a warrior—unless it be a pair of deerskin leggings fringed with wisps of hair from scalps of his own taking—is a magnificent necklace made of seventy to forty three or four-inch claws of grizzly bears, on a foundation of otter skin, with a pendant of the same fur that hangs down the back to the waist, and is adorned with beaded rosettes.

An old-time warrior of fine figure, naked to the waist, but with one of these necklaces about his neck, looks indeed, as he would have you think, "a man."

Nowadays these necklaces are very hard to obtain, owing to the fact that the grizzly bear has been exterminated from many of his ancient haunts, and they are very highly valued. Even in olden times they were not easily acquired. My good friend, an old Oklahoma Sauk named Mesiwuk, said to me:

"It took a *man* to wear one. We had only two ways of getting those claws. First, a warrior could go out and find a grizzly bear, and kill it. That was not easy. Any one can knock a man over the head, and he quickly dies. But a grizzly bear—well, our young men did not always come back when they went to war on one of them.

"Then there was another way. A man could go up into the Sioux country and kill a Sioux. Grizzlies used to be plenty up there, and many Sioux had necklaces of their claws. But it took a *man* to kill a Sioux!"

Later I repeated this conversation to my Sioux "brother-in-law," Jingling Cloud. He laughed a moment, and then said seriously—

"Well, I will say this—I have noticed that the Sauk Indians have more of those bear claw necklaces than any other woods people."

I consider this an implied compliment of no mean value.

The GOODLY COMPANY of ADVENTURERS

The Admirable Crichton

by POST SARGENT

Author of "Plato," "Hugo Grotius," etc.

HOW wonderfully soothing to one's self-esteem—and how vastly uncomfortable—it would be to serve as the whole world's exemplar of conduct and courage and chivalry and super-swordsmanship and hyper-handsomeness and brilliant accomplishments and—learning! To send one's name echoing down the ages as the *ne plus ultra*, the *beau idéal* of manly paragons.

Yet such a man once lived. Sir Galahad, da Vinci, Sir Philip Sidney, Lorenzo the Magnificent, d'Artagnan, Mozart, Pascal, Roland and Aristotle, all rolled into one. The absolute in versatility.

A rôle that scores have since essayed. No shrinking violets, these. R.I.P. *De mortuis nihil nisi bonum*—let the dead pick their own epitaphs.

A rôle at once romantic and—cloying. Perhaps for this reason James Crichton was glad to die at the age of twenty-two, having garnered the admiration and awe of his contemporaries and the imperishable name of "The Admirable." And the manner of his passing—

To be sure, a few years after Crichton's death in 1583, a certain Thomas Dempster, himself a man of great learning but dubious character—and doubtless moved by conceit and jealousy—undertook to deny to The Admirable the cognomen conferred on him by universal acclaim.

But the title had already been securely vested in him by the authority of the erudite of England, the greatly learned of France, the sages of Italy; not to mention the great gatherings that marveled at the profundity of his learning, the nimbleness of his wit and sword, the beauty of his face, the courtesy of his bearing, the Apollo-perfect skill of fingers and voice in all manner of music, the excellence of his horsemanship, the prodigy of his linguistic attainments that undid the work of Babel and brought the ancient Chaldean and Hebrew once more into fellowship with the numerous progeny of Kelt and Teuton and Latin.

From among the noted writers of that age who have given testimony to the amazing gifts of mind and body of The Admirable Crichton, what happier authority could be chosen than Castiglione, whose "Book of the Courtier" was a very Bible of the society of the epoch and has since remained one of the foremost classics of Italian literature?

> The aforesaid Scot, James Crichton, is a youth of some twenty years. He possesses many languages: Latin and Italian excellently well. He makes epigrams in Greek, Hebrew, Chaldean, Spanish, French. . . . He shews himself profoundly versed in Philosophy, Theology, the Mathematics and Astrology. And to these endowments is added so remarkable a memory, that when he hath once heard an oration or sermon, he can repeat it again to the most minute word. He improvises Latin verse in whatever kind of measure and on what subject you will; he discourses with solidity upon affairs of state or matters of war. He is most handsome of countenance and figure; marvellously perfect courtier; a soldier of the best, having passed two years in the

wars of France. He dances, rides, sings, does feats of arms superlatively well, having proved himself with all manner of weapons. He hath all of Aristotle and his commentators at his fingers' tips, disputing them in Greek. He knoweth all of Scotus and the Thomists by heart; nor does he argue of any matter not proposed by others. In sum, he is a marvel of marvels; so that, in seeing so many and such prodigious talents united in a single body, very various and strange conjectures have arisen concerning this remarkable person.

Thus endowed, with a Master of Arts degree at the age of fourteen, and having mastered all the martial exercises of that age of chivalry, James Crichton set forth to tour the continent—to "finish his education." The troublous times that followed the reign of "Bloody" Mary were ripe for deeds of adventure. These called to the brilliant lad, but first he was disposed to test his intellectual vigor.

Arriving in Paris, he gave challenge, as the custom was, to all learned doctors to meet him in public disputation at the College of Navarre, on whatever subject should be proposed to him, whether "practical or abstruse," and in "any one of twelve specified langugages." Before a brilliant assemblage he encountered and defeated the most eminent philosophers and divines. Useless to attempt to describe their astonishment and pæans of praise.

On the following day he appeared with all the fire and freshness of youth at a tilting match in the Louvre. With consummate skill and daring, in the presence of the fairest ladies and the greatest nobles of France, he defeated all rivals one by one. Conqueror with sword and lance of many of the most valiant knights of the court, he took his honors modestly. Mindful of the happening of the preceding day, the spectators' ecstasy became delirium.

They dubbed him "The Admirable." Known henceforth to his contemporaries by no other name, he sustained his reputation as a prodigy of intellect and bodily skill, in wars, in the halls of the learned, in tournaments, in debates on philosophy—wherever the erudite or valorous could be met—and vanquished. Paris, Venice, Rome, Padua, Mantua; the great and minor courts of France and Italy; even the palace of the Pope. He entered the lists with any arm; he accepted challenge in any tongue.

Doubly knight-errant out of the joy and in the pride of youth, there came to him a sterner test of manhood than that of jousts or even battle-fields.

Being one day but newly arrived in Mantua, he found the court and city in a ferment over an indignity offered to the fair name of all its citizens. For it must be remembered that the age of chivalry was not yet past; personal honor, punctilio and probity were still cherished as the counter poise of the growing bad manners and lack of ideals among the nobles, clergy and statesmen of Europe.

While Italy was still a miscellany of petty states, each princeling—as each of his lords, each burgher, down to the meanest Tony Lumpkin of his domain—had in varying degree the local pride of soil, the prestige-and-partizan complex.

Shortly before the arrival of The Admirable Crichton there had come to Mantua one of those strange products of that age of chivalry—a "monstrous abortion of Mars," to use the term of one obscure chronicler. As the Sphinx had fastened itself upon ancient Thebes, until destroyed by the wit and courage of Oedipus, so this other plague descended upon Mantua.

A bravo! A traveling gladiator! One of those desperadoes of the olden age who hired out their swords and daggers for use when poison failed. Lions on occasion in point of bravery and death-skill, but despicable by reason of their motives. Killing was with them a trade. They were the paid butchers of nobles still meaner than themselves.

This invader of the peace and honor of Mantua, relates one Sir Thomas Urquhart, was a certain Italian "of a mighty, able, strong, nimble, and vigorous body; but by nature fierce, cruel, warlike, and audacious, and superlatively expert and dexterous in the use of his weapon."

Having at that period no patron or master, he made his living by preying on the fears—and on the courage—of the inhabitants of the many Italian towns he visited. Elated by his uncommon skill and considering himself, because of continual victory, quite secure from death at the hands of other swordsmen, he had abandoned the career of paid assassin and adopted the more lucrative one of roving duelist.

His custom was, on his arrival in any city, to challenge all those who chose to try their skill with him in single combat. He himself laid down a certain sum of money, and his opponent the same amount, with the proviso that the united purses should be the spoil of the conqueror. It was further his custom to placard the town with taunts and slurs directed against the honor and pride of the citizens. Sheep, the burghers; the gentlemen without skill in the weapons of the knight. Due to his own remarkable fighting ability as well as to his system of avoiding some of the cities where sword champions were known to live, he had so far bullied and terrorized his way to wealth.

UPON his arrival at Mantua, three gentlemen had speedily accepted his challenge to defend the knightly reputation of their city. All knew the hopelessness of a successful issue from such a combat. All three paid the penalty of rash courage with their lives.

Their deaths were the subject of universal regret at the court of Mantua. This feeling became the more poignant because of the ungenerous exultation and insolence of the victor.

And then The Admirable Crichton arrived! He found the city buried in its own shame and mourning its impotence. For according to custom, the Duke of Mantua had given safeguard to the ruffler. Hence none might do him injury except in open combat.

Let Urquhart now speak in his quaint language.

"The conquering duellist, proud of a victory so highly tending to both his honor and profit, for the space of a whole fortnight, or two weeks together, marched daily along the streets of Mantua—without any opposition or controulment—like another Romulus, or Marcellus, in triumph; which the never-too-much-to-be-admired Crichtoun perceiving, to wipe off the imputation of cowardise lying upon the court of Mantua, he could neither eat nor drink till he had first sent a challenge to the conqueror, appelling him to repair with his best sword in his hand, by nine of the clock in the morning of the next day, in presence of the whole court, and in the same place where he had killed the other three, to fight with him upon this quarrell that in the Court of Mantua, there were as valiant men as he; and for his better encouragement to the desired undertaking, he assured him, that, to the aforesaid five hundred pistoles, he would adjoin a thousand more; wishing him to do the like, that the victor, upon the point of the sword, might carry away the richer booty."

In the event of victory, Crichton set forth his intention to devote the entire sum of three thousand pistoles to charity among the poor of Mantua.

Two rapiers of equal weight, length, and keenness were given to the combatants in the presence of the duke, his duchess, "with all the noblemen, ladies, magnificos, and all the choicest of both men, women and maids of the city."

To signalize the importance of the event, the signal for attack was given "by the shot of a great piece of ordnance, of three-score-and-four-pound ball."

The crowd is breathless. Will this mere lad, for all his lithe and handsome body and the vast opinion of him that has reached Mantua, redeem the reputation of the city? Will this stranger stripling save Mantua from being the laughing-stock of all Italy?

"The two combatants, with lion-like animosity, made their approach to one another; and, being within distance, the valiant Crichtoun, to make his adversary spend his fury the sooner, betook himself to the defensive part; wherein, for a long time, he shewed such excellent dexterity, in warding off the other's blows, slighting his falsifyings, in breaking measure, and often, by the agility of his body, avoiding his thrusts, that he seemed but to play, whilst the other was in earnest.

"The sweetness of Crichtoun's countenance, in the hottest of the assault, like a glance of lightning on the hearts of the spectators, brought all the Italian ladies on a sudden to be enamoured of him; whilst the sternness of the other's aspect, he looking like an enraged bear, would have struck terror into wolves, and affrighted an English mastiff.

"Though they were both in their linens (to wit shirts and drawers without any other apparel) and in all outward conveniences equally adjusted; the Italian, with redoubling his stroaks, foamed at the mouth with a cholerick heart, and fetched a pantling breath: the Scot, in sustaining his charge, kept himself in a pleasant temper, without passion, and made void his designes."

The art of sword play that The Admirable Crichton had learned from English, Italian and French masters, stood him in no better stead than the swift mental parrying he had learned in debate, or the cold logic gained from the study of philosophy and the higher mathematics. He outplayed his man, now by keener sword play that brought in the secret thrusts and parries taught him by the greatest blades of Europe; now by sudden attacks upon the far slower intelligence of his antagonist. Cuts, feints, and *ripostes*, so sudden and fierce, so bewilderingly delayed or diverted, that the Italian's mind became confused and wearied, in proportion as his great body grew fatigued.

"Matchless Crichtoun, seeing it now high time to put a gallant catastrophe to that combat—falls to another part and, from defender, turns assailant. Then it was that, to vindicate the reputation of the Duke's family, and expiate the blood of the three vanquished gentlemen, he allonged a stoccade in full; then recoyling, he advanced another thrust, and lodged it home; after which, retiring again, his foot did beat the cadence of the blow that pierced the belly of this Italian."

Three death-strokes he gave, each in that part of the body where each of the three gentlemen had received his mortal wound. At this point the good chronicler waxes as enthusiastic as that Mantuan audience must have done.

"And he expiring, with the shril clareens of trumpets, bouncing thunder of artillery, bethwacked beating of drums, universal clapping of hands, and loud acclamations of joy for so glorious a victory, the aire was so rarified above by the extremity of the noise and vehement sound, that the very sparrows and other birds were said to fall to the ground for want of aire enough to uphold them in their flight."

Urquhart's exaggeration doubtless did no more than echo the joy and praises of the people of Mantua. Certain it is that the duke engaged James Crichton as the model and preceptor to his son, Vincenzo di Gonzaga, a young man of evil passions and dissolute life. And The Admirable Crichton served his new overlord with the intense loyalty and devotion that were so much a part of his nature. To his own hurt, although his name has not suffered thereby.

When walking one night through the streets of Mantau and playing upon the guitar as he went along, he was suddenly attacked by a riotous company of persons in masks. With the skill and dexterity for which he was so noted, he soon foiled and put them to flight. Toward the close of the combat he disarmed and seized the leader of the party. Upon unmasking him, he discovered that it was the young Prince of Mantua. Although The Admirable Crichton had only acted within his rights, he was deeply concerned at what seemed to his chivalrous mind a transgression of the code of a gentleman.

He instantly dropped upon one knee and, taking his sword by the point, he presented it to the Prince. Vincenzo, naturally of a revengeful and treacherous temper, now inflamed by wine, irritated by defeat and perhaps by jealousy, accepted Crichton's sword and plunged it through his heart.

Thus The Admirable Crichton died, in the twenty-second year of his age. In this last encounter he preserved that superiority to all other men that had made his life so remarkable. Conquered only when his high ideals of honor had made him renounce the powers and prowess that had rendered him invincible upon every other occasion.

EQUIPMENT FOR TROOPS ORDERED OVERSEAS

by Leonard H. Nason

BEFORE an officer was allowed to go overseas his equipment had to pass a very rigid inspection. He had to have a great many things: Hat cords, pistol belts, boots, bedding roll, folding basin, flashlight and extra battery, two suits of pajamas—very useful these last—a pillow, three O.D. shirts, slippers—oh man!—four suits of heavy underwear and three suits of light underwear. And this equipment had to be purchased by the officer; it was not issued. If the officer had it not, he was not allowed on the ship. In addition, as soon as the officer arrived in France, he fled to Paris and bought three or four uniforms and several pairs of boots.

Judge then of the howl that went up when an organization was ordered to the front and no man, not even the division commander, was allowed more than fifty pounds of baggage. That would just about be a bedding roll and two blankets. In my own regiment many of the officers were still in debt for their outfits and, aside from that, they had no idea of abandoning several pairs of very magnificent boots and two or three equally gorgeous uniforms to the untrustworthy hands of the Q.M. for storage. They conspired among themselves.

We were issued French transportation, that is, our baggage wagons were *fourgons* and *chariots de parc* or "slat wagons." They all had cute little boxes under the seat and about the body and, in addition, the limbers had receptacles for the carriage of feed for the horses, boxes sandwiched in between shell racks. About two days before we went to the front we made a practise march, full packs, wagons loaded, nothing left in the camp whatsoever. And everything that a man owned had to be taken on that march, for there was no one left behind to take care of it for him. I had an extra pair of laced boots—not regulation—and some other things that I tucked into the *fourgon*.

Alors, as the Frogs say, when we were about two miles from camp our downy old colonel ordered a halt and every man must spread his pack, and the wagons be unloaded. There was consternation then. Many a dismounted man had nothing in his pack but straw, and there were lots of unauthorized junk in those wagons. There was no camouflaging it, the old colonel had been in the army too long. He went down the line and took all the names of the straw packers, and told me I'd have to carry my boots around my neck and not in the wagon. At the end of the column he stopped, and every officer drew a sigh of relief.

"Now," said he, "on the way back we'll inspect the feed boxes in the limbers and wagons."

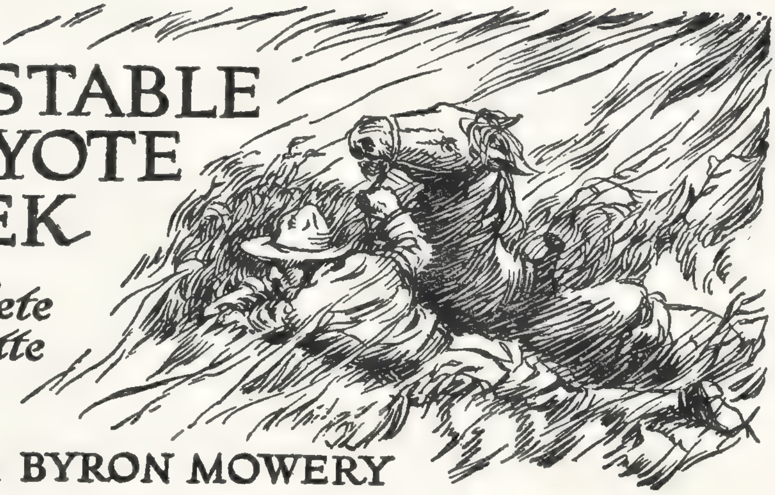
The Americans, by the way, carry their horse feed on the saddle, and all drivers ride the horses, not the seat, as is done in the French service. The first feed box he opened was the one on my instrument *fourgon*. The Old Man himself had a pair of boots in there, and they went into the ditch. The first limber he came to contained four pairs of boots and a uniform, neatly folded in brown paper.

"My," said the colonel, "this isn't right, horses can't eat boots!"

He went on up the line and the ditch began to look like a rummage sale. Pajamas, folding chairs, trick cots, trench coats, boots, uniforms, underwear, Turkish towels, several bathing suits, all these the feed boxes yielded, while the officers who had purchased all that stuff per order looked sadly on.

"Now," said the colonel, smiling upon all, "those who may wish may pick up their property." No one stepped out. The colonel smiled again. If any officer had picked up any of that display of clothing he would have been tried for disobedence of orders, and that was no slight offense when an outfit was on its way to the front. So we turned and went sadly back to camp and those who looked regretfully at their clothing in the ditch could see quite a cloud of French civilians helping themselves to it.

The CONSTABLE of COYOTE CREEK



A Complete Novelette

by
WILLIAM BYRON MOWERY

Author of "Hard Lines," "A Lamb and Some Slaughtering," etc.

CONSTABLE PRAWL, between strokes of the curry comb and brush, was outlining the day's work to his sorrel mare, who had retreated to the far end of the picket rope and was cropping the dew-glistening grass.

"We'll mosey down toward the Border today, Molly old lady, and take a look-see through Dry Bottoms. Last time I heard from Red Haley, Red said there's a two-man whisky ranch som'eres down that way. These Yankee Sioux are bad enough eggs sober; if they ever get a supply of forty-rod fight-water—hollup here, you ——, they'll be Little Big Horns with us Mounted all over these broad smiling prairies."

The morning sun was just gilding the top of the whitewood drogue in which stood the constable's solitary, lonesome cabin. A gray smoke curled up from the waters of Coyote Creek. In a dead elm four magpies cocked an eye at the remains of Prawl's breakfast tossed behind the cabin; and waited impatiently for him to ride away on patrol. In another tree a whisky-jack and a red squirrel were quarreling like brothers over a vine of wild blue-grapes. Upstream a grouse boomed his hollow, reverberating, wilderness note.

Westward three miles a jumble of high clay hills, heavily wooded and almost pathless, stood up abruptly out of the prairie and ranged on westward toward the Rockies. To the east and north and south of Coyote Creek lay the rolling park-country; wind-whipped; blistered and browned by the long summer sun; and untenanted save by occasional bands of roving Assiniboines or Sioux or Chippewas, hunting the small herds of buffalo that strayed up from the Montana bad lands.

Five years before, the cabin in the whitewood drogue had been rendezvous for a "permit" trading outfit; but at the coming of MacLeod's yellow-stripes, the traders had wisely departed for parts unknown.

Later, after the place had been made a patrol outpost of the Mounted Police, the men of that division had dubbed it "The Deserter's Delight," "The Hermitage," "The Hop-Off" and "The Sinner's Sanctum."

There was a reason for the names, and a reason also why Constable Bingham Prawl had been assigned to the lonely station.

He finished the curry combing and was fetching saddle, bridle, rifle and patrol outfit from the cabin, when he stopped suddenly, listening.

From far away northwest the crisp morning air brought him the faint popping of a rifle. Two shots; an interval; one shot; a longer interval; then two more.

"That's for us, Molly old lady," Prawl observed, after the last two shots. "Wants us to wait for him. Whoever he is, he plugged the nickel—we was just ready to lift the hoof away from this place. I wonder what's on his mind."

He put down the things he carried, and

lighted his cob. The mare looked at him quizzically and fell to grazing again.

Between three and four minutes later, to Prawl's great surprize, a thin column of smoke spiraled up from the brow of the nearest hill three miles straight west. Presently the spiral broke into abrupt puffs, which were tossed out to right and left of the perpendicular column.

Prawl reached for his service glasses and studied the smoke. His forehead wrinkled.

"And that's another signal, old girl. If I know smoke-talk it's another sign for us to wait. Well, we're waiting, ain't we? We heard him the first time. But that lad laid down tracks, he did, he did. He traveled a mile and built that fire in less than four minutes, or I'm a liar. He must be almighty scared he'll miss us. Something's up!"

The smoke signal stopped; silence brooded over Coyote Creek valley for five minutes.

Sweeping his glasses over the stretch of prairie toward the hills, Prawl was startled by a totally unexpected shout behind him—to the east, across the creek. He whirled around and reached instinctively for his Snider carbine; then dropped the weapon to his foot, and waited.

A *shaganappi* cayuse and rider broke through the willow thicket, splashed recklessly across the creek and galloped up to him. A Crow Indian, hardly more than eighteen years old and slender as a reed, leaped off the pony with a terse "Wock!" of greeting.

"Suffering polecats!" Prawl snorted in open amazement. "Jumping-Deer is the right name for you, lad. Is that a pony you're riding, or a blessed antelope? How's come you circled east after making that smoke-talk yan?"

The young Indian looked west toward the hill, over which the spiral still lingered.

"Jumping-Deer no make that smoke-talk. He come out of rising sun."

"Hump! Then somebody else is ——-bent for this place. But what's your word? Let's have it before the other party gets here. Brought a message from Haley, I suspect."

THE Crow nodded and pulled a dirty paper from his legging. Prawl smoothed the creases of the long sheet. On one side was a crossed-out order from a U. S. cavalry captain to a sergeant. On the other was Trooper "Red" Haley's penciled message, dated thirty-six hours previously at field quarters across the Border.

Prawl read:

> DEAR PRAWL:
>
> Got your message about lookin out for the Stonies with the stolen cayuses. Seen nothin of 'em so far. Will keep on lookin, and no favor to you at all.
>
> See here, Prawl, one fellow about my size and general complection is developin a tired pain at the way these Sioux are being handled; and I'll bet my girl's hoop-skirt you're feelin the same way. Off and on we've sent a wagon-load or so of generals and bishops and soft-soapers up there beggin Black Moon and Sittin Bull won't they please come back where they belong; and your officers have talked themselves blue in the face without budgin an Indian.
>
> That's the trouble: too much talk and not enough *do*. When it comes to oratin, B. M. or S. B. either one can outjaw all the generals and officers this side the sulfer pits. Unless somethin drastick is done, Sittin Bull is goin to sit right where he is till the cows come home.
>
> The prospect of tentin down here in these alkali flats the balance of my born days watchin for Sioux don't rest well on my stomach. I want to get back to Buford some time, before that fat-head inf. corporal walks off with all creation and marries her.
>
> What's up my sleeve, Prawl, is a little plan. Since the generals etc. all fell down flat with their powwowin, suppose you try some buck cop generalship and see if you can't start things to movin. I can't work the game myself for I'm tied to this command; I'm not a foot-loose maverick like you are.
>
> The only thing, Prawl, she's a —— dangerous undertakin'. That won't stop you, I guess; but if you try it, for Mandy's sake don't let the Sioux catch you at the game or your carcass won't be worth hawlin home for taller.
>
> Now here's my idea—

A yell from the direction of the hills broke into Prawl's reading. He shot once with his revolver, to let the man know he was waiting. Then he read the rest of the letter.

It sketched the plan in a few sentences; boxed in a rough chart naming hills and creeks, and closed with a second warning of what would happen if the Sioux caught him.

Prawl read it twice, slowly the second time; and stood wide-legged, thinking hard.

He realized, as Haley did, what a terrific risk he would run; and he was not so cocksure as Haley that the scheme would have substantial results, even if he carried it out successfully and escaped the Sioux afterwards.

One sure thing, the plan was full of dynamite.

A SECOND Indian, the party who had yelled, rode over a swell half a mile west of the creek, and waved his arms. As he came closer Prawl recognized him as Many Eagles, a roving Chippewa sub-schief who had a band of ten lodges under his control.*

Many Eagles and his fourteen bucks were in bad odor with the Mounted. They were suspected of stealing horses, killing cattle, and starting prairie fires to drive game. Nothing had been proved against them, however.

The sub-chief was in a high pitch of excitement. A hundred yards away he started his tale of wo, and continued it unbrokenly as he yanked his pony up short from a dead run and tumbled off face to face with the constable.

The main facts, as Prawl gathered them, were that Many Eagles and his following had been camped at a little lake twenty miles southwest in the hills; that Sitting Bull and a large band of Sioux had appeared, maltreated the Chippewas, were holding them prisoners and threatening them with death.

The sub-chief managed to escape during the night and came for help.

Prawl swore a round oath at the alarming news. Inasmuch as Sitting Bull's band had murdered seven Chippewas under similar circumstances not many moons before, the Sioux chief would probably carry out his threats.

Sergeant Larett and eight men were thirty-seven miles west and north in a crow-line, and Inspector Milton's post was twenty miles farther on. To get word to them would kill a day; for them to send a detail to the Sioux would kill another day.

In other words they could not get there in time to save the Chippewas.

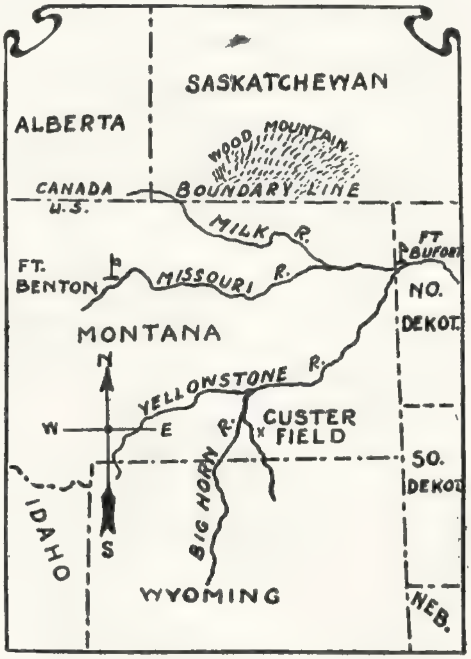
"I'll go," he decided, profoundly moved by Many Eagles' anxiety for his little band. "Mebbe I can do something."

He looked a third time at Haley's rough map and took a mental picture of it. If he got through his trouble with Sitting Bull he meant to go on and try out Haley's idea.

He tore the message to small pieces, scattered them, and spoke to the young Crow. "Go in my cabin, get something to eat; then go back and tell Haley I'll do what he said if I get a chance. You better swing away east. These Sioux probably have scouts out.

"Now you," to Many Eagles, "you and me will high-tail it for Sitting Bull's—"

He stopped short in the middle of the sentence and stared at Many Eagles, then at his pony. A puzzled frown spread over his face. The Indian was weaponless save for a hunting-knife.



"Where's your rifle? What did you do with it after you signaled me?"

Many Eagles' bewilderment answered the question. Prawl snorted.

"I'll be double ——! Here I been two weeks without seeing a soul or getting a word from anybody, and then three parties cloud-burst upon me before I can say jingal-o! We've got to hold off a minute. Somebody else is ——bent for this place—the fellow that gave me that Mounted signal with the rifle."

In a couple of minutes a horseman rode out of a patch of timber up left on Coyotte Creek, and cantered leisurely toward the cabin.

"Colquhuon," Prawl remarked, recognizing the half-breed scout and trailer who was attached to Inspector Milton's post. "Hope they're all here now. I've about got my hands full as it is."

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*The Chippewas or Ojibways were called Salteaux—Rapids People—by the fur voyagers, and Pointed-Skins by other Indian tribes, either because of their manner of curing beaver pelts or else because of their peculiar moccasin. Their seat was the Lake Superior region, but the settlement of Ontario forced a large portion of them west to Manitoba; and a part of these wandered still farther west, taking up the habits of the plains Indians.

The *meti* brought a written order from the Inspector. Prawl read it with angry eyes. It gave a flat terse command; also, a hint he had been lax in his patrolling.

> Several more head of stock killed at Three Leavings. Were valuable government cattle given to the half-breeds there. Positive evidence against the Chippewas, probably Many Eagles' band. In your territory. Get busy.

Across the bottom of the sheet, Sergeant Larett, through whom the message had passed, had scrawled a kindly word.

> How are you making out, Bing? I meant to send Chapman down to stay with you several days, but simply can't spare him. The inspector is on a mean prod over those cattle, so don't think anything about his note. If you need any help at Three Leavings, just holler.

Prawl swallowed a couple times as he felt the warmth and friendly encouragement in Larett's brief message.

"I'm coming to think," he said slowly to himself, "that there's only one right-hearted fellow in this whole outfit of dudes from the Old Country and bums from Ontario. That fellow is Dave Larett. I'll send Milton just as short and sweet a line as he sent me. He can like it or lump it, for all I give a hickory-knob."

He tore a sheet from his patrol book, fished a pencil stub out of his jacket pocket and printed a vigorous reply.

> I've got no time just now to look after dead bossies. I'll go to Three Leavings when I get around to that.

* * *

BEHIND Inspector Milton's curt order and Constable Prawl's equally curt answer, lay an ugly situation; a situation which in its human aspects was little short of tragic.

In the words of the detachment, Constable Prawl was on the toboggan, which meant that so far as his standing in the Force and his esteem in barracks were concerned, he was headed for the bow-wows of proverb. The solid friendship of the men, which would have made amends for official dislike, was not his; he was, as Haley wrote, a maverick.

The isolated outpost on Coyote Creek was a bugbear in the division. Its long patrols, its loneliness, the rugged wildness of its prairie and hills, made it an unenviable place for a constable to be sent to.

The names which had been given the station meant two things: that assignment to Coyote Creek was a form of discipline, of punishment; and that the thing expected of the constable sent there was to step across the Border and quietly fade out of the Force altogether.

Prawl was on the toboggan partly through his own fault, partly through that of his officers, and partly because of a series of unlucky accidents. The three combined would have broken nine men out of ten.

The year before he had lost two police horses in a strip of soup-thin muskeg. His report that he had been boxed by a prairie fire and tried the muskeg as a last hope did not mend matters in official eyes. He had captured three horse-runners that winter, but they overpowered him one night in camp and made their escape. A string of other accidents such as might have happened to any man, piled up against him.

A person of more diplomacy and tact could have sailed through these misfortunes without damage to his standing. But hardly Constable Prawl. Big, raw-boned, restless, he reminded one of a lean hawk. He had his strong points, but in honest truth he was hasty and blunt with what he had to say, and was hard to get along with, unless one discounted three-fourths of his gruffness.

His officers thought him hot-tempered and insubordinate. Their bad opinion and dislike were bound to spread eventually to the men, and influence their attitude toward him. In consequence Prawl thought the whole Force was down on him, and thought he was down on the whole Force.

It was the old story of the vicious circle, going from bad to worse. Reprimands had followed the accidents. Prawl fought back, giving as hard as he took, if not harder. "Yes sir" was not in his vocabulary. He was clearly at fault in not realizing that there is a vast difference between disciplining and domineering. His officers were at fault at thinking they could discipline a man of his granite nature by punishment.

The circle could have been broken by an open display of horse-sense and charity on either side. Prawl, that lonesome summer, had had plenty of time to look back over the circumstances which had put him on the toboggan. He acknowledged to himself that he had been at fault, but he was too stiff-necked to say so frankly to his officers, or to make the first step toward a better understanding with them.

If, for instance, he had answered Milton's note respectfully and stated his reason in detail for disobeying the order, the inspector would have been quick to say, "You did exactly the right thing, Prawl." And if Milton had couched his order in the tone of Sergeant Larett's note, Prawl would have answered respectfully. And so on, back to the hard luck which started the circle.

Only Sergeant Larett seemed to like and understand Prawl, and he grinned good-naturedly at the constable's erratic ways, and took no stock in his grouchiness. Only Larett, because he had a keener human insight and warmer sympathy, could see through Prawl's cross-grained exterior into his lonesome soul; and understand the deep, subtle reasons which had put the constable on the toboggan; and see the tragedy of a good man's loss of faith in his fellows and his work.

The sergeant had labored in Prawl's behalf. He keelhauled the constable many a time for his hard-boiled ways. He talked him up to the officers and talked him up in barracks. But it was a hopeless job. Prawl had started off on the wrong foot. He simply could never "come back" in that division.

Prawl had been at Coyote Creek since the first of April. Even the Indians called him the Lone Fire *shee-mog-in-ish*—policeman. He had stuck during the lonely months; had ridden his hard patrols day in day out to the best of his human ability.

He had surprized everybody—except Sergeant Larett—by not slipping across the Border. That very surprize was proof that they had him entirely wrong.

As Larett said:

"Bing Prawl may desert and slink across the Border, but it'll be on skates—when —— freezes hard and fast."

But the situation had become so taut that it had to break; and the hard-boiled reply which Prawl handed to the *meti* scout was enough and more than enough to break it. He himself knew that perfectly well.

"Here, Colquhuon," said he. "Take this to Milton. When you go past, tell Larett I said hello, and getting along all right. Tell him I'd 'a' wrote a line except I've got to beat —— and tanbark down to Sitting Bull's camp."

II

AT TEN o'clock, four hours after they had left the cabin on Coyote Creek, Prawl and the Chippewa sub-chief pushed their foam-lathered horses up to the crest of a hill and saw the Sioux camp straight ahead, not quite a mile away.

The site was a grassy little *prairion*, locked in by clay hills and buckbrush plateaus. About one hundred buffalo-skin teepees were pitched in a semi-circle half way around a small lake. A rifle-shot south of the camp was another, a larger lake, whose steel-tinted water suggested good fishing.

Herded behind the lodges were the Sioux mounts—stolen ranch horses, ponies in four colors, and about a dozen trim saddle-horses which, as he later saw, bore the regimental brand of the Seventh U. S. Cavalry.

Four years previously the Sioux and their Allies had fled across the Forty-Ninth Parallel to escape retribution. Their demands to be given reservations were peremptorily refused, yet they stayed on, ignoring the generous offers which General Terry and others had made to them if they would return to the States.

Unwilling to see them starve, the Police had given them rations during the lean months and supplied them with enough ammunition for hunting. They had repaid the kindness in Sioux fashion—by exhorting the Canadian Indians to league with them and wipe out all the whites in the northwest provinces.

Prawl guessed that lack of meat had made this band break off from the main encampments farther west, and come into the eastern hills, where hunting and fishing were a little better.

He had no difficulty identifying Sitting Bull's big teepee pitched in the middle of the half-moon and right beside the lake-edge. The ten unpainted lodges of the Chippewas still stood—scattered among the Sioux teepees.

Very few children played around the encampment, but the place was thronged with bucks—he estimated between three and four hundred. During the few minutes that he watched, one hunting party came in from the west with three antelope and two deer, and another party rode away to scout.

With the naked eye Many Eagles pointed

out to him things which he could hardly see with the glasses.

"An ugly outfit to wade into," Prawl thought to himself. "They're short of meat, and that don't make them any better tempered. I've got *a* chance, you bet, of making 'em release the Chippewas. Down here by myself in the middle of nowhere, the —— knows what they'll try on me. But I'll say in advance, if Sitting Bull sticks his Winchester against my belly like he did Sergeant McDonnel, I'm liable to grab it away from him and bust his head."

They rode down the long slope, passed out of the scrubby timber, followed a game trail down to the lake, and started around the shore.

They were espied when they left the timber. A tense quiet settled over the Sioux encampment. The bucks idling around the teepees bunched up in knots of a dozen. One warrior hurried to the big central lodge and disappeared inside.

With Many Eagles a length behind him, Prawl rode between the teepees and knots of Indians straight for Sitting Bull's tent. He had a good grip on himself. He rode along jaunty, erect, nodding slightly at warriors whom he had seen at one time or another.

A couple grunted; the rest did not reply at all. They knew what he had come for. Their hostile reception of him ought to have been a warning.

Though he seemed to be looking straight ahead of his nose, Prawl kept his eyes wide open for everything about the camp. All the warriors were big and powerful men. All had magazine rifles; some were armed with Springfield cavalry carbines. In their belts they wore vicious looking coup-sticks.[*]

Here and there in teepee flaps Sioux women watched him—one shawl over two heads. Most of them were middle-aged or old squaws, as shapeless as a bag of hay tied in the middle; but quite a few were graceful, pretty young women, black-eyed and attractive.

In front of the chief's tent a dozen warriors, picked men, stood in Prawl's way. They were Sitting Bull's body-guard, he surmised. One of them made a gesture that he should surrender his belt-gun and carbine. Prawl laughed in his face.

Remembering that Sitting Bull either could not or would not talk English, he swept his eyes over the warriors and spoke to them.

"Who talks with white man's tongue?"

No one answered.

He made the sign that he wanted an interpreter[†]. One was speedily brought—an old Yankton Sioux sub-chief. Prawl dismounted, and followed the sub-chief into the teepee.

It was his first sight of the Sioux chieftain. Sitting Bull sat against the far wall of the teepee on a white buffalo robe, with a repeating Winchester beside him. He was a heavy-built and rather short man, between forty-five and fifty. His face was more round than oval, his nose bulbous, his dark eyes remarkably brilliant.

He wore no head-dress at the time; his hair in two thick braids hung down across his chest. His shirt was decorated with quill work. On the right side the figure of a red snake was inwoven; on the left, a black, rearing animal which resembled a moose.

At his first glance Prawl was struck by the driving power in Sitting Bull's face. The blink of his eye carried authority. Not a little of his power lay in the sphinx-like solemnity he could assume. Perhaps the only pleasant thing about him was his smile—the sullen corners of his mouth turned up, his eyes twinkled, and the hard lines of his face broke into a multitude of wrinkles.

He greeted the red-jacketed constable with a smile—which did not delude Prawl at all. At his gesture Prawl sat down. He went straight after his business, looking directly into Sitting Bull's eyes, though his words were for the Yankton sub-chief.

"Many Eagles came to my teepee when the sun rose, and said that Sitting Bull and his warriors have formed a war lodge[‡] against the ten Chippewa families. I have seen with my own eyes that the Pointed-Skins are held prisoners here. That can not be; the laws of the Big Chief Woman forbid it."

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[*] The typical Indian coup-stick was a long slender pole or stick used to "count coup", i. e., the warrior who first touched an enemy with the stick got his scalp and belongings. The Sioux article however was both weapon and ceremonial. It was made of a stone wrapped in a leather socket and attached to a handle about two feet long—obviously a weapon designed for more than merely touching an enemy or teepee. In ordinary battles they used it to give a wounded enemy his quietus. The Sioux told Captain Clark, R. N. W. M. P., that in the fierce mêlée at the Little Big Horn, they used the coup-stick with deadly execution.

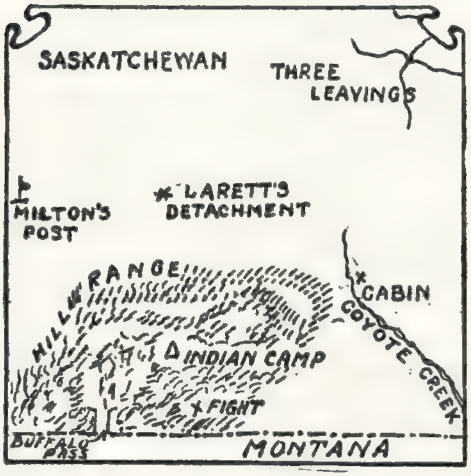
[†] The sign is: Put fingers to mouth, speak a couple words, hand the words to an imaginary person who hands them to a second imaginary person.

[‡] An almost untranslatable term. In a general sense it means declaring military law. In Indian ethics it would somewhat excuse Sitting Bull's act in making prisoners of the Chippewas.

HE STOPPED a moment, to see how Sitting Bull would take the words. The sub-chief interpreted. Sitting Bull did not answer; not a muscle of his face moved. He simply kept his eyes fastened upon the constable.

"This land," Prawl continued, striking the ground with his hand, "is the hunting territory of the Pointed-Skins. Sitting Bull and his warriors have no right to it except what right the Pointed-Skins are willing to give them.

"Many Eagles and his ten families were camping here first beside this lake, hunting in these hills. Sitting Bull should have pitched his lodges somewhere else. But he can stay here if he releases the Pointed-Skins and allows them to leave."



When the speech had been translated to him, the Sioux chief sat for a moment impassive, blinking his eyes slowly. Prawl expected him to begin a harangue. Instead, the Sioux leaned forward slightly, his lips opened, and he spoke one flat resounding English syllable.

"No!"

It hit Prawl so hard and unexpectedly that he started in spite of himself. The cold, hypnotic gaze of the chief made him uncomfortable. But he kept control of himself and returned the stare.

"You will release the Pointed-Skins," he repeated, more bruskly. "You will give them back their ponies, their dogs, and their weapons. You will release them before the sun peeps through the smoke-hole of this teepee."

Sitting Bull did not argue the point. He simply leveled a finger at the flap door of his lodge. A curt order to get out, while getting out was good.

Prawl did not move. An anger surged up in him, but he curbed it. He knew now that his mission was not only a forlorn one for the Chippewas, but more than dangerous for himself.

Anger would only provide the Sioux with the excuse he was itching for—an excuse to start something. He would have to play the chief's own game, the game of bluff. He thought swiftly.

"When I go ," he said, smacking a fist into his hand, "the Pointed-Skins will go with me. Do you want Chief Milton to be told how you have treated them?"

"Your Chief Milton will hear nothing about it. The Pointed-Skins will stay here. I am a chief of many warriors. Thunder is my relative. I say the Pointed-Skins will stay here. They are dogs!"

Prawl had heard those three words before from Indian lips, and understood them perfectly. When every other possible excuse for a base deed was lacking, the party upon whom the deed was perpetrated was simply a dog!

"But," Prawl reminded him, "I have a tongue. I shall go to Chief Milton and tell him what you have done to his friends the Pointed-Skins."

The threat inflamed the Sioux. He grabbed up his rifle. Prawl reached out, caught the descending muzzle, and held it away from him in a steel grasp. He craned forward until his face was only a few inches from the Indian's. His steady gaze met the eyes that glittered under the black brows. One hand slipped to his belt gun.

"If you try to shoot me, I will kill you here and now."

He meant every word, every inflection. The brazen attempt to kill him filled him with a cold, deadly anger. And, on the Sioux's finger, he had caught a glimpse of a gold ring—a ring he had heard about. As a white man, the sight of the ring stirred him to his depths.

The dull gray hue of fear spread over Sitting Bull's coppery features. Slowly the Winchester came down; was laid aside. Prawl's hand still clutched his Enfield, his eyes watching every slightest move of the Sioux.

Sitting Bull gave a sidelong order to the interpreter. The latter slipped out of the lodge. When he came in again he was followed by an even dozen warriors, the bodyguard. They squatted around the walls of the lodge, rifles across their knees. Prawl did not bat an eye, but a chill raced up and down his backbone.

"You have raised your hand in a threat against me," Sitting Bull said haughtily, his courage recovered. "You have promised you will speak an evil word against me. Good.

"You have said you will not go until the Pointed-Skins go with you. You love the Pointed-Skins; they are your brothers. Good. You will stay with them, here in my camp. It is good that I should do the same to you as I shall do to your brothers. So Chief Milton's ears will go hungry. There will be no one to tell what happened to his warrior the Lone Fire, or his friends the Pointed-Skins."

Prawl had known full well when he came to the camp that he was thrusting himself into danger. But he had not suspected Sitting Bull would go the length of murdering him. That was exactly what the Sioux's words meant; what the armed warriors meant; what the snarl on the chief's face meant.

For a split-second his brain whirled. The sudden ominous turn of affairs daunted him.

He wetted his lips as if to speak, and gained time to control himself and think. His next move would be the last card in his game of bluff. If he lost—

"You can kill me," said he. "Here are twelve warriors and two old women in this lodge, and three hundred warriors outside. So you probably can kill me. I am a Lone Fire. You can tie rocks to me and throw me to the turtles in the lake. You can knock the brains out of the Pointed-Skin warriors, and strangle their women. You are thirty men to their one."

He waited until the sub-chief interpreted; and then went on.

"But tonight Jumping-Deer, a young Crow of Red Feather's band—tonight Jumping-Deer will reach Chief Milton's camp. He will say that he rode with Many Eagles and the Lone Fire to the hill from which they sighted the Sioux lodges. He will say that the Lone Fire went down to Sitting Bull's camp.

"Tomorrow or the next day Chief Milton will ask, 'Where is Lone Fire?' He will send runners. If they do not find me—"

HE PAUSED to see if his lie had lost or won. As the sub-chief translated, he caught a furtive fear stealing into the Sioux's eyes. His heart leaped. But he did not push his advantage recklessly. That advantage was all too slender and precarious. Instead he chose his words carefully, persuasiveness in his voice now.

"What will happen when his runners find that I never left your camp? Chief Milton gives you ammunition to hunt game with. He would give you no more. He gives your warriors food when they come hungry and ask for it. He would give them no more.

"He would order you to go back across the line, and would summon other yellow-stripes and soldiers of the *Shaga Lasha* to make you go. The Crees and the Blackfeet are friends of the *shee-mog-in-ish*. If you kill one of us, they too will dig up the avenging hatchet. The whole *Mela Haska* nation is your enemy now. If you make enemy of us, in all this land you will have no place to pitch your teepee.*

"What good will it bring your camp to kill these Pointed-Skins? None. It would be a papoose's foolishness to pull destruction down upon yourself for no reason at all. A wise chief will let the Pointed-Skins go in peace."

A ripple of the approving "How!" ran around the circle of warriors even before Sitting Bull slowly, reluctantly nodded.

As if to cover up his submission as gracefully as possible, the chief launched into a long oration, cataloguing the miseries that overwhelmed him, the lack of food among his bands, the injuries he had received at the hands of the *Mela Haska;* and bemoaning the Big Chief Woman's edict that the Sioux would be given no land in Canada.

The change from a haughty, murderous-minded chief to a self-pitying, whining innocent was so sharp and blatant that Prawl had to laugh to himself.

When the oration was over and the chief had proffered a friendly hand, he left the lodge, led his mare aside where she could

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***Mela Haska*—Long Knives or Americans. *Shaga-Lasha*—British.

graze and then gave Many Eagles brisk orders.

"Get your teepees down. Gather the ponies and be ready to leave in twenty minutes. I'll watch. A Sioux promise is not worth a bodewash chip. I'll go along with you three or four miles."

The Chippewas did not waste much time getting away from the Sioux camp. In one quarter of an hour, Prawl was riding east at the head of a straggly rout of fourteen bucks, as many squaws, three dozen children, a dozen heavily-laden ponies and an uncounted number of small fat dogs of the cooking-pot variety.

When the lodges were being struck, he had kept a sharp eye out for cow-hides or other evidence that the Chippewas had killed stock at Three Leavings. He saw none, but he put the question point-blank at Many Eagles.

The Chippewa denied it hotly. His denial sounded sincere; Prawl was convinced he told the truth. From his previous dealings with the Chippewas he had not believed them guilty anyway.

Four miles from the Sioux camp he stopped on a hill, and pointed ahead.

"Our trails fork. You go on east to the prairie. Stay a safe distance away from the Sioux. That's my orders, and don't forget 'em."

The Chippewa objected. He wanted to go south toward the Border where there was a chance for buffalo. Prawl repeated his orders tartly. Many Eagles finally gave a half-hearted, reluctant promise. Very plainly he did not mean to fulfill it. Prawl rode away in disgust.

"If he gets into another tight hole with the Sioux, he can pull out by himself. If he can't take orders, he can take consequences!"

FEELING somewhat chesty over the lonehanded way he had made the Sioux chieftain toe the line, Constable Prawl pointed the mare southwest It was a thirty-mile trip, though only eighteen in a straight line, to the place which Red Haley had indicated on his rough map. Prawl had been there the previous summer, when he and three other constables had worked in from the western end of the hill range.

He wanted to reach the spot and get in his good licks before night if he possibly could. Hours were vital. And if any trouble popped he could make his getaway duting the night.

He forced the mare to her limit, but the miles were slow and toilsome. He had to watch the country ahead and keep to the plateau timber belts where the going was harder than in the valleys.

He knew perfectly well there were Sioux scouting parties all around him in the hills. If the Indians caught sight of him so far off his regular patrol, they would get suspicious and shadow him. Such an event would be decidedly unhealthy.

It was a losing race with the sinking sun. On up and down slopes he could not push ahead faster than a walk; a purple-colored ground vine, tough almost as bow-string, continually tripped the mare. On the wooded terraces he had to plow through the buckbrush that had shot up with the second-growth.

The tangled branches and briars, windfall and interlaced saplings tore slits in his clothing, slapped him in the face, and scratched him raw. Time and again the steep-walled clay cañon he tried to thread turned out blind, and he had to retrace a hard-won mile. The strong dry wind that blew continuously out of the northeast became monotonous, then irritating.

Within ten miles of his goal he struck easier going; the woods were clearer, the slopes were covered with sage grass instead of the bramble snare, and the valleys were wider. But darkness came, and there was no moon.

He had to stop and camp in a deep little *prairion* shut in by high red-clay buttes. He was hungry from eating nothing for fifteen hours. Antelope and geese were fairly plentiful, but he dared not risk discovery by shooting.

The *prairion* had a little patch of niggerhead in its low center. Thinking he might possibly find a diamond-back turtle among the water-snakes infesting the marsh, Prawl began beating through the green flags.

By great good luck he plumped into a brood of mallards almost big enough to fly. They exploded under his feet and scattered in a dozen directions, with a *quawk* that nearly knocked him over.

The flags were shoulder-high, the water knee-deep, the marsh dark and forbidding. But Prawl was hungry enough to eat his saddle. He cut a club from a willow and grimly started after duck—slipping, splashing, sprawling full length at times when he ran into pot-holes.

When he emerged from the niggerhead twenty minutes later with two young mallards, he was soaked wet, plastered with mud and a sight for sore eyes generally.

"One thing anyway," he said optimistically. "This jacket ain't as red as she used to be; the Sioux can't see me so far away."

He built a small fire, dried his clothes and broiled the ducks. He ate one, wrapped the other in leaves for reference the next day and went to sleep early.

At the first glint of gray the next morning he was up and in the saddle. The remaining five miles he covered in short order.

Just at sunrise he rode up a long slope covered with lodge-pole timber, and stopped on the watershed. Habitually cautious when Indians were around, he dismounted in a clump of vines and windfall and screened himself from sight.

"In the nick of time, Molly, old lady," he observed. "Now we got to figure out ways and means."

BELOW him lay a long valley, stretching south toward the Border and opening out like a funnel. Its slopes on each side were steep and gutted with washouts; and at top of the slopes a high bluff rimmed the valley completely in, except for a hundred yard pass at the head.

The place looked entirely different from what it had when Prawl saw it before. From bluff to bluff a prairie fire had swept down through it, completely destroying the timber and the buckbrush. Indian handiwork, he guessed, to drive the game down upon the open prairie.

The valley was clothed now with sage grass whipping in the stiff northeast breeze and with stirrup-high shrubbery, brown and dry. The little stream, oozing down the valley center, ran through half a dozen green *prairions*, a few acres to each.

In one of these, about eight hundred yards from where he stood, a herd of two thousand buffalo were pasturing on the aromatic bunch-grass. They were headed north toward him. Several dozen bulls were crossing the brown strip to the last green patch. A band of cows and calves had fallen a quarter mile behind the main herd.

They were moving slowly, perhaps a mile an hour, then heading for the heart of the clay-hill range where they could find green pasture in the muskeg flats. They had come scarcely twenty miles since Haley wrote his line about them.

Below them in the valley grazed a pair of large elk; above the herd, not three hundred yards from Prawl, were five cabbry, or white-tailed antelope. A big flock of "coffee-heads" hopped and *tur-a-leed* around and over and through the herd.

As he stood beside his horse watching them, he deliberated upon what he called "the ways and means." He had to make a job of it the first crack, because he would get only one chance.

His decision was to gallop down the slope straight at the buffalo; shooting, waving his saddle blanket and yelling. That would stampede the lead bulls back into the main herd; the main herd would be thrown into a panic, and the whole drove would thunder down the valley.

If he rode their tails hard and kept up the scare, he could have them across the Border in less than two hours time. Neither wild buffalo nor wild horses could draw the American Sioux across that fateful line.

He was just on the point of starting his campaign when a little incident down the valley caught his eye.

He had noted, or thought he noted, a slight uneasiness among the buffalo, but had given it no second thought. Now, however, the little thing he saw stopped him dead short. If he had not had a keen eye and known buffalos pretty well, he would have ridden unawares into a trap.

Eight cows and their calves at the lower end of the herd near a patch of shrubbery, snorted suddenly in alarm, ran a hundred yards up the valley and whirled around, looking back, making up their slow minds whether or not to be scared. Nothing happened. They began pasturing again, though plainly uneasy.

Something had scared them. What? If they had seen or scented a lurking wolf, the cows would have bunched together and stood their ground instead of running as they did. That was buffalo nature.

With a strong hunch that something was wrong, Prawl quietly led the mare farther back into the bushes, tied her to a sapling, and then bellied out to the open ridge-line again. With his glasses, he looked down at the shrubbery patch to see what was what.

He had scarcely got the patch in clear focus when he tensed and swore beneath his breath.

Five Indians lay in the edge of the shrubbery, motionless, watching the buffalo.

Probably they had not seen him or they would have inched back into cover. What tribe they belonged to he could not make out for sure at that distance; he merely could see that all five were strapping big warriors armed with rifles. But he guessed instinctively they were Sioux—a party which had been out scouting for game and found the buffalo in the valley.

He quickly reasoned what their scheme was. By themselves the scouts could not hope to kill more than a few dozen of the animals. Their strategy was to drive the herd with infinite patience and caution into the maze of hills where they could be impounded in a blind valley. Then a couple hundred warriors, summoned from the camps, could slaughter them to the last hoof.

As Red Haley had emphasized, the camps even then, in summer time, were sadly in need of meat. In the fall and through the coming winter they would need food desperately. The two thousand buffalo, besides furnishing them with a great stock of meat, would supply them with new robes, teepees, clothes and the thousand small articles which they made from the animal.

For a moment after the discovery of the five scouts, Prawl thought his scheme was blasted. He did not see how he could possibly carry it through. The moment he showed himself and tried to stampede the herd, the Sioux would also jump out of cover. The five of them could drive the buffalo past him in spite of all he could do; and beyond doubt would shoot him to boot for his attempt.

But he could not force himself to give up his idea—and Haley's. He could not slip away beaten; he was not built that way.

He lay there half an hour thinking, wrestling with the problem of how to stampede the buffalo down the valley and across the line.

At the end of that time, when he backed into the buckbrush and stood up, he had hit upon a solution.

He hurried through the brush to the west side of the pass, slid forward on his stomach across the ridge-line and into the sage. Gathering a handful of the dry grass, he kindled it, waited until it blazed up, then scattered it just in front of him.

WHEN he saw that it was sure to spread, he slid back out, ran to the center of the pass, repeated with the fire and then did likewise at the east side.

Keeping out of sight, he hurried down the bluff three hundred yards where the smoke would not blanket the valley from him. From the edge of the butte he watched.

For a few minutes the grass fire spread slowly, quietly, with little smoke or crackling. For several rods down the slope the backbone was a shelter from the whipping wind. The main herd grazed peacefully, though the lead bulls kept throwing their huge heads up, sniffing the air and rumbling.

At last the three patches of fire met, and pushed down the slope abreast. About that time the wind caught it squarely. The tiny crackling swelled to a roar; the flames seemed suddenly to leap to life, licking long yellow tongues twenty feet ahead of them.

A solid wall of fire sprang up and rolled down the valley with hurricane force and speed.

The buffalo stared stupidly at the onrushing fire. The lead bulls bellowed and pawed the ground; the main herd, less excited, began to mill. Not until the wind flung a festoon of smoke into them did they budge. But when they did—

With the flip of two thousand tails they were off down the valley, thundering ahead of the yellow prairie fiend. The green patches of muskeg-ground quivered like huge bowls of jelly as the herd plunged across them. The low roar of their stampede echoed from bluff to bluff, filling the whole valley.

Fast as the buffalo went, the antelope sailed around them like white-rumped birds.

Prawl took his eyes off the stampede and watched the five Sioux. The Indians had sprung from their cover and tried to turn the herd. Sitting Bull and all his warriors could not have stopped that wild run. The five scouts broke in front of the charge, scurried like jack-rabbits to a deep washout, leaped on their ponies tethered there and galloped down the valley.

When they reached a point where it was

wide enough, they shot off at a tangent and let the herd thunder past. They followed, to get out of the way of the fire. Two miles farther on they cut into an *arroyo* on the left side and disappeared from Prawl's sight.

For twenty minutes more he watched the herd. It swerved neither to right nor left, but tore straight down the valley for the Border. The roar died away; and at last the smoke of the fire cut off his distant sight of them.

But at the rate they were going he figured they were due to lay down twenty miles before they stopped.

He hurried back to the horse, realizing he had waited too long already.

"Thing for us to do, Molly old lady, is to high-tail it for home. We've done our part of the trick—we have; that drove'll be cooling their flanks in the Milk River by evening. But these Sioux will come back to see what started that fire. They'll find your tracks. And unless I miss my guess a mile, you're just naturally going to have to pick up your feet and ramble.’ ’

INSTEAD of returning home the way he came, Prawl headed straight east. By doing that he could get to horseback country quicker. He fully expected to be pursued. Given half a chance, he knew the mare could easily outride the grass-fed ponies in a long endurance run. So he felt quite confident, and chestier than ever.

His pride was perhaps pardonable. He had ridden into Sitting Bull's camp, told the chieftain exactly what to do, and—what was more—had bluffed him into doing it. Lonehanded still, he had just achieved a feat which, in all likelihood, would have a weighty influence in forcing the Sioux to return to the States that fall.

If they had secured the two thousand buffalo, they would beyond doubt have gone into winter camp north of the forty-ninth parallel. With the unrest* already astir among the Blackfoot Nation, the Crees and the *metis*, and with the Sioux genius for intrigue helping things along, the——might be to pay before spring came.

He wondered what Inspector Milton would say if he knew. Probably give him a raking over the coals for doing something without orders.

And suppose Sitting Bull got hot about the incident and started in to make good some of the threats he had been breathing against the Mounted lately? The possibility of that struck Prawl like a boulder avalanche. Well, it was done, come good or bad.

He kept a sharp eye over his back trail and pushed the mare along at a swift gallop. In an hour he had laid down seven miles without seeing anything of the scouts. But his common sense told him that they ought to be tracking him, and a growing instinctive uneasiness told him that they were.

It was an uncomfortable feeling. He decided that he had to know.

On the crest of a hill he stopped and wheeled the mare around. Looking back over three ridges to a high backbone, he located the approximate spot where he had topped it. With glasses focused upon the spot he waited. He did not have long to wait.

Some fifteen or eighteen minutes later five horsemen—flung out in a line a hundred yards wide as a pack of well-trained hounds will trail—whipped over the hill and disappeared into the next valley. Their speed and their grim concentration was something to take note of.

Prawl whistled.

"Holy cats, they mean business, they do! Old lady, take them legs of your'n out of the band box and put 'em to use."

Still he felt confident. The Indians were about a mile and a half behind. The mare ought to hold her own till she struck the prairie ten miles east; once on the open plain, with the ponies half-winded, she would run off and let them standing still.

Ahead of him the hills were fewer now; the grassy stretches between them were broader and free from brush. To the south lay a small badlands, an impenetrable crisscross of gullies, washouts, buttes and low, miry muskeg.

Straight ahead three miles, a high, clay knob, crowned with a tuft of wind-gnarled pine, stood squarely in his path. A mile and a half north and a little west of the clay knob stood another, its twin.

As he galloped down the slope, Prawl decided to cut in between the two hills. He was picking his route ahead, for the level stretch was pitted with sink-ins. A long gully which could not be jumped would put him in an ugly predicament.

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*The unrest which culminated in the Reil Rebellion five years later. It arose from the transfer of the Northwest from Hudson's Bay Co. ownership to the Crown in 1869, but did not become acute until the virtual disappearance of the buffalo.

He also kept an eye out behind him. When he was halfway to the clay knob, he decided it was time for the five Sioux to be topping the ridge from which he had spotted them. He kept turning in the saddle, watching.

The scout party did not appear as it should have done. Prawl was puzzled. He acted on the maxim that it is best not to know what to expect from an Indian. Slowing the mare to a trot, he gave the hill his whole attention. Still nothing. Finally he stopped, and focused his glasses upon it.

The first time that he caught a tiny bright glint at the top of the hill, he thought it was the sun playing a trick with the glasses. But he caught a second, and a third, and a fourth flash.

Turning only his head and shoulders, he trained the glasses at the high clay knob ahead of him. One flash from a point near the top was all he waited to see.

"Good ——," he breathed, "another nest of 'em! They've got us boxed. If we can only get around that north hill without 'em cutting us off! If we don't—we're dead niggers."

He wheeled north; drove the spurs in hard; leaned forward in the saddle, speaking in low sharp tones to the mare. She responded with a splendid burst of speed.

If any horse he had ever ridden could have carried him out of the trap, she would have done it. If she had had level ground in front of her nose, she would have brought Prawl through even though the Indian mounts were cutting across the short angles. But the north hill was her nemesis—and Prawl's.

The Indians had guessed what escape he would try—there was only one direction he could take. From the clay knob four Sioux were galloping toward the right foot of the north hill. The five who had trailed him were cutting toward the left foot.

Long before he was within rifle-shot of the hill, he saw that he was neatly caught in the trap. If he tried to take the slope, they would pot him before he could get over the steep long rise. If he swerved either to right or left, he would come within effective rifle distance of one of the packs. If he turned back they would drive him into the bad-lands and get him on foot.

He faced the inevitable; made up his mind in a twinkling. Rather than be cut down trying to escape, he would hole in and shoot it out with them. Reining the mare up short, he rose in the stirrups and looked around. A couple hundred steps to the right, he saw a sink-in—a deep little pocket. He cantered up; led the mare into it. At his sharp order she lay down as obediently as a dog would have done.

Prawl ran his hand along his cartridge-belt, shook the saddle-stiffness out of his frame and heaved his head and shoulders over the bank.

THE hole could not have been a better shelter if he had dug it himself in advance. It was a little diamond-shaped sink-in, about twenty feet long, twelve wide, and shoulder deep. By lying down, the mare was completely protected from bullets. Prawl necessarily had to expose himself a little to watch his enemy.

A couple hundred yards around the hole the ground was covered with a mat of short grass and vines and yellow flowers; the mat was thick and soft as felt, but hardly high enough to give the Sioux cover if they tried to sneak upon him. And luckily there were no gullies close.

For fifteen minutes after they had driven him into the hole, they rode around him in a circle, five hundred and fifty yards away; lying flat on their ponies, yelling, occasionally sending a harmless bullet in his direction. They did not circle in closer, as he was hoping they would.

He would have given an ear for a long-barreled Winchester. The Snider was good enough for three hundred yards, but no great shakes at five-fifty. Nevertheless he tried with it.

Judging elevation carefully, he took a steady aim and fired three shots at the nearest Indian. At the first spurt of fire the Sioux ducked out of danger on the far side of his pony. At the third the pony stumbled and fell dead, shot through the heart.

From cover of its body the Indian poured five wrathful bullets at Prawl. The other seven emptied their rifles at him. But he had popped down like a gopher into its hole.

Silence fell. In a minute or two he craned his head cautiously over the bank to see what they were up to.

They had dismounted and were wriggling toward him through the mat of grass; hiding behind the clumps of sage and yellow flowers.

They were certainly adept at the game. In spite of the scanty cover which would hardly shield a rabbit from the eyes of a hawk, he could not have seen them without his service glasses. As it was, he could watch every move they made.

He waited until the nearest Indian, a sub-chief and leader of the warriors, was within a reasonable distance; and then shot twice. One of his bullets struck. The Sioux jumped up, tried to run but collapsed.

The rest evidently thought better of their intentions of sneaking upon the red-jacket; they lost no time backing away to a safe distance. They knew that with carbine and revolver he could drop four or five of them before they could rush across the open and kill him.

The wounded Indian was thrashing about on the ground three hundred and fifty yards away. He acted as if his leg was broken, and evidently he was in great pain.

The sight of the Indian suffering, trying to crawl, enduring his pain silently, stirred Prawl to pity, enemy or no enemy. He stood it for five minutes, and then could stand it no longer.

Keeping a sharp watch on the other eight, he stood up in plain view and jerked his arms back and forth, palms extended. The Sioux answered the truce signal, at least to the extent of dropping their rifle butts to the ground.

He made signs that two of them should come in, get their wounded sub-chief, carry him back and look after him. By way of promise, he laid his Snider on the ground and folded his arms.

It was an index to their own natures that they should believe he was treacherously trying to lure them within range. They simply stood in their tracks, staring at him.

When he saw where the hitch was, Prawl got angry. He caught up his carbine and leveled it at the wounded Indian, as a sign that if they did not come and get him he would kill him outright. His threat had effect. As soon as he laid the Snider on the ground again, two of them loped in and carried the wounded sub-chief back to safety.

They deposited him on the prairie about eight hundred yards away, in the direction of the south hill and attended to his wound. Then, as token that the truce was over, one of them whipped up his rifle and shot at Prawl.

A couple minutes later he heaved up and looked. Five of them, leaving three to hold him, had drawn together and were sitting on their horses having a pow-wow.

"Ways and means of acquiring my top-covering without my killing half of 'em," he concluded. "I wonder—"

He reached for his glasses and drew the Indians within fifty feet of him. The Sioux whom he had unhorsed was looking up at the four and was talking and gesticulating fiercely. Prawl watched the gestures, trying to read a hint of what he was saying.

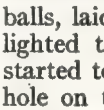
His face paled suddenly.

"Lord! I might've knowed they'd try that. Especially after my putting the idea into their heads this morning. Molly old lady, we got to work fast."

He reached out on the sod, grabbed several handfuls of grass, wadded it up into four balls, laid them on the rim of his hat and lighted them with a match. When they started to burn well, he jumped out of the hole on the northeast side, ran forty feet away, scattered the torches along a hundred-foot line in front of the hole, and was sliding to cover as the Sioux raced in and began whizzing bullets around him. He drove them back with an answering volley.

By the time the Indians started their fire, his had burned halfway to the hole. In the short space of forty feet it could not get up much heat or smoke. As it crept up to the edge of the sink-in, he held the mare firmly and quieted her instinctive dread.

The ends of the fire crept around the hole and swept on over the prairie, leaving a wedge of unburned grass on the south side of his covert. He burnt that, to have a clean strip all around him.



THE Sioux had gone back fully half a mile to start their fire. Fanned by the strong wind, rose higher and higher as it leaped toward him. Prawl, watching helplessly, had a queer feeling in his stomach. Forty feet was a pitifully scant protection from that wave of fire.

Ground sparrows, larks and longspurs flushed ahead of the flames and darted over him with shrill pipings of terror. Curlews and upland plover rose straight up out of sight to escape it. Bulging-eyed cottontails streaked past. A pair of big blueracers, bloated with field mice and gophers, glided into the pit, darting their forked tongues at him.

They threw the mare into a panic; she sprang to her feet and would have jumped out of the hole and galloped off, if Prawl had not leaped and seized her bridle. With his free hand he drew his revolver and shot the snakes, and then kicked them out of the pit.

The next instant, as the fire struck him, he was fighting for breath, battling the frenzied, struggling horse, feeling as if he were being roasted alive. Engulfed and blinded by a blanket of smoke and stinging sparks and scorching heat, he fought through the black endless minute.

It was briefly, mercifully over. The wind whipped the blanket away from him; the fire split to each side of his protecting swath, and rolled away south over the prairie, flanking in two wide strips the fire which he had started.

He quieted the horse again; commanded and coaxed her till she lay down. Spite of a hundred smarting burns on his face and hands, he crawled out of the hole, stood up, waved his hat and yelled in derision. Only his shrewd guess and his quick work with the protecting fire had saved him.

When the Sioux saw that he had come through alive, they tethered their horses at a safe distance and bellied up to five hundred yards. From eight different points of the circle they began a systematic sniping, hoping to drive home a lucky bullet.

It was by no means a hopeless plan. They were shooting Winchesters, which carried accurately that distance. Prawl had to jerk up into view every few seconds to guard against a rush. Mere chance was in their favor.

He countered with all the cunning he possessed. He looked up at different points around the hole, and at different counts, outguessing them, though several times bullets burned past him so close that he blinked and dodged.

After an hour of this, the Sioux backed off, leaving three men again to guard against an attempt to escape. The five had another powwow. Prawl crawled out of the pit and sat on the ground, watching them. He could not divine what they were planning, but he knew something was up.

Two of them came back to help guard him; the other three galloped off toward the north hill. At first Prawl thought they were going for help. He was quickly set right.

They stopped at the first lodge-pole clump and chopped down six long slender saplings. Hitching their ponies to them, they snaked the timber out toward the hole.

Seven hundred yards away they stopped and set to work, while the other five kept galloping around the besieged constable. He caught a note of triumph in their taunts now.

In half an hour the three Sioux, with tomahawks and leather thongs, had fashioned a heavy, door-like barricade, three feet high, five feet wide and three poles thick. Three runners, roughly adzed flat on the bottom side, were put under it so that it could be pushed forward. A prop behind kept it from falling backward.

When he realized what they were up to, Prawl was struck cold. It was surely his swift finish. The ten to twelve inches of tough timber would be absolutely impervious to a rifle bullet at point-blank range.

When it was ready, four of the Sioux got behind it; the other four were lying in the prairie south of the pit to prevent the white man from making a break.

The barricade began to move forward, as steady and irresistible as the hand of fate.

Prawl racked his brains. He could think of no counter-move this time; no way of escape. There was no escape. This was the grim finale; for him, his wind-up as he called it, with a twisted, mirthless, defiant grin.

The barricade came on and on, a dozen yards at a time. As it got within two hundred and fifty steps it slowed down and approached more cautiously. The four Sioux on the south side stopped yelling; those behind the buttress were quiet as the whisper of death, intent only upon their work.

When the barricade was one hundred and fifty yards away, Prawl drove three hot bullets into it in sheer desperation. He might as well have been shooting into a rock bluff.

As it came on within a hundred steps, he laid the carbine aside and pulled his heavy Enfield revolver from the holster. It would be a better, a faster weapon for the finish face-to-face when the Sioux leaped from behind the barricade down upon him. He took off his cumbersome cartridge belt and laid it aside; there would be no reloading.

Then, flattened against the sloping bank, he kicked a toe-hold in the ground and waited for the Sioux.

A golden eagle from the Rocky Mountains hung motionless overhead, so high that the ear barely caught its screaming *chak-chak-chak*. Three feet in front of Prawl a field-mouse thrust its wriggling nose out of a hole, and fearfully inspected the blackened sod. A lark flew back to its destroyed home, and sang disconsolately, perched on an old buffalo skull.

A flock of magpies, their long tails awkward in the stiff breeze, beat heavily across from the north hill to the clay knob. They alighted for only a moment; suddenly frightened at something, they wheeled on south with a gabbling, garrulous chorus of alarm.

Then everything seemed to quiet, awaiting the finish.

IN THE dead silence the alarm-yelp of the wounded sub-chief rang out suddenly—high-pitched and piercing. It was caught up, echoed by the four Sioux to the south.

Prawl snapped his head around; he saw them leap to their feet and dart toward their ponies. Amazed, bewildered, he shot a look in the direction of the wounded Sioux, and saw the good and sufficient reason.

Out of the buckbrush at the foot of the clay knob, a close-riding band of fourteen Indians had flung themselves. Lashing their ponies and waving rifles, they rocketed across the prairie, riding like abandoned fiends. When they saw the Sioux had discovered them, they loosed a yell that could have been heard ten miles.

In his dumfounded astonishment, Prawl stood bolt upright. The four Sioux behind the buttress could have cut him down with scarcely taking aim. But they were no more thinking about him that he was thinking about them. Abandoning barricade, they streaked for their ponies.

The hostile Indians split, seven of them galloping after the Sioux who had reached their horses; the other seven pounding straight down at the four on foot. The four never reached their horses. Rifles started popping. One of the Sioux fell. Another stopped and leveled his Winchester, but he was cut down before he could shoot. With a whoop and a point-blank volley of bullets the seven riders crashed down upon the other two and blotted them out.

The four who had reached their horses and fled were getting away. They were better mounted and had fear to lend them wings. After several long-range volleys, the seven wheeled and galloped back to join the others. The band trotted up to the sink-in.

Prawl had clipped on his cartridge belt and caught up his rifle and led the mare out of the hole and was waiting for them, a slow broad grin on his face. The sub-chief jumped off his pony and took the constable's outstretched hand.

"I knowed it," said Prawl. "Knowed—— well you was going to break orders and come south. But I swear I didn't think I'd meet you down here—like this!"

THE Chippewa told his story in a dozen grunts. His lodges were pitched four miles east of the clay knob. He had seen the smoke of the fire. Rode out to see the cause. Looked down from the clay knob; saw a sorrel horse; one man fighting the eight Sioux. Guessed it was Lone Fire.

He finished his story with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Well," Prawl commented, "I can't very handy give you a lip-larruping for disobeying orders this time; fact is, I disobeyed orders myself in coming down here. But I'm going to give you some all-fired sound advice.

"If you know what's good for your hide, you'll high-tail it east or north and get clean away from this country here. I expect this work today about evens you up with Sitting Bull for the Chippewas he killed last February. But he won't look at it that way."

Many Eagles agreed that the Lone Fire *shee-mog-in-ish* spoke with a very wise tongue.

"So I'll go with you," Prawl continued, "as far as Coyote Creek. You can go on northeast a ways from there. Now, let's be stepping. We'll let that wounded Sioux here. The others will be back tonight to see after the dead 'uns."

As he put his foot in the stirrup, he took one last look at the pit where he had watched the barricade inching upon him.

"That," said he to himself, "that was what they call a real close shave."

III

PRAWL reached his cabin the next day just after dark. He guessed, and guessed correctly that within a day or two he would get a message from Milton, ordering him to come in and answer to charges.

He knew that when he did go in he would never come back to Coyote Creek again. One offense—among a dozen which could be charged—was his getting into trouble, inviting trouble, with the Sioux. The strictest order on the board was to avoid any clash or friction whatsoever with them.

He wanted to finish off a couple of pieces of work before he went in. He wanted especially to free Many Eagles and his band from the charges against them.

The next morning at daybreak he headed northeast for Three Leavings. By working on the assumption that the Chippewa subchief and his band were innocent, he cleared up the cattle-killing in three days' time. He made no arrests; if he had, he would have been forced to take the guilty parties in. They could be arrested any time.

After amassing bed-rock proof he quietly rode off—not to his cabin but east to a scattering of *meti* settlements. He found out there that the Assiniboine horse-thieves he thought had gone across the line, had stayed north of it. He killed a week searching leisurely for them. And he found them. After sending a message to the nearest post forty miles east, to come and get the Assiniboines, he turned back to his cabin on Coyote Creek.

As he expected he found a note from Milton tacked on the door inside. It was ten days old now. It simply ordered him to drop his work and come in.

Another, a week later, from Larett:

> For goodness sake, Bing, come on in before I have to send a detective to arrest and fetch you.

Prawl packed up his slender belongings and hit the trail for the post.

"Can't demote me, I guess," he said sardonically. "That's one good thing about being as low as they go. And he can't stick me in a worse place than I've been—except the butter-tub."

A few miles from Larett's detachment he met Chapman on patrol, and talked a few minutes with him.

Chapman was friendly; markedly friendlier than he had ever been. Prawl shrewdly suspected he had heard things and was friendly out of pity for what Prawl had coming to him.

"You didn't hear about Larett, I guess?" Chapman remarked. "Larett's getting his commission."

Prawl's mouth flew open. It was the best piece of news he had heard in years. It made him forget his gloomy forebodings about himself.

"It's too durned good to be true—in this outfit," he commented.

"It's a fact. Larett told us at mess a couple mornings ago. We gave him a weak sort of cheer. Guess there ain't nobody but'll hate to see him go."

"Go?"

"Yea. Soon as the rest of these Yankee Sioux get back across the line and we don't need these extra detachments here, Larett's going north on the *Saskatchewan* to C. O. a post."

Prawl sagged in his saddle. Larett going.

For the first and only time in his service he was tempted to turn his horse around and ride south across the line. But he shook off the temptation.

"Milton's here at Larett's post," Chapman rambled on. "Come over to meet a States cavalry captain and make arrangements about the Sioux."

Prawl did not answer; he hardly heard. He was thinking about Larett's leaving. He had wondered what the last straw would be; this news was it.

"You didn't hear about them Sioux either, I suppose?" Chapman queried.

"About 'em—what?" he asked indifferently.

"Why they're baggaging up and hightailing it for home."

"The whole round-up?"

"Sitting Bull ain't gone yet, but his minor chiefs are deserting him, and he'll have to go before snow flies.* One of his chiefs—Bear something—either Pretty Bear or Spotted Bear or Bear's Head or—anyway, one of the Bears left day before yesterday with a whopping big band, and two more are going this week. That's what the Yank troopers are up here about—to help make arrangements."

Prawl clucked to the mare and started on, but he stopped in a few steps.

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*The last of them were across by the middle of December.

"Say, Chapman, did—was there anything said about me having a shooting party with some Sioux down the line?"

Chapman nodded.

"Yea, the news leaked through to Milton. That scouting party didn't belong to Sitting Bull, but to one of the Bears—"

"Thanks," Prawl said coolly. "That's a plenty. Guess I'll be riding on in. The quicker the better."

He touched the mare and rode on. In half an hour he sighted the post.

Four big white tents were pitched near the barracks and two dozen strange horses were mingled with the police mounts in the corral. Several constables and eight of the troopers were scattered around the barracks and tents, talking.

Prawl stopped at the first building, the stables. Constable Hendricks, in the doorway, came forward and took the bridle.

"I'll put her away, Bing. Mighty glad to see you. Here, shake a paw. Milton and Larett and a couple of the Yanks are in Larett's cabin. Milton wants to see you."

"Does he? Well, that's strange! Thanks. I'll go right to him."

He strode across to the cabin, knocked, and went in.

* * *

SERGEANT LARETT, a big, raw-boned man a good deal like Prawl, was talking to a smart looking cavalry non-com. Milton and the captain were seated at a table, figuring. Larett nodded. Milton turned around and laid down his pencil. He too nodded.

"If you gentlemen," said he, "will not take offense—just a couple minutes with Constable Prawl here—"

"Oh certainly," the captain agreed.

"That includes you, Larett," said Milton.

Larett followed the two Americans out. On the threshold he turned and flashed a look at Prawl. He tried to tell Prawl something but the constable did not get his meaning.

Milton sat on the edge of the table. Prawl stood squarely in front of him; his hair ruffled, his eyes hard, defiance written all over his face. The inspector looked him over.

"Now for the music," Prawl thought. "He's so —— mad, he looks pleasant, I swear. I've seen cats that way."

"Prawl," said Milton, "I'd like to hear just what you've been doing since I sent you that first message two weeks ago."

"All right," Prawl reported briefly. "I went to Sitting Bull's camp and told him to let loose of Many Eagles and his fourteen bucks. Then I went on south and drove a herd of buffalo back across the Border. Then I had a fight with a Sioux scouting party. Many Eagles came along and got me out of a bad hole. Four of the Sioux got killed. Then I went to Three Leavings. Found out some Piegans killed them cattle. They used Chippewa arrows and left Chippewa moccasins behind 'em as a blind. Then I went east and attended to some horse-runners. Then I came here."

"How did you find out that those buffalo were coming north?"

Prawl checked himself. He suspected that the cavalry captain was Red Haley's officer. He also suspected that the trick with the buffalo had back-fired. He did not want to incriminate Haley in his own misconduct. The trooper had been in as hard a row of stumps as he himself had been.

"I just stumbled on 'em."

"I happen to know," Milton said evenly, "that you're not telling the truth there, Prawl. This man Haley is here at the post now. He has admitted his part."

"If you knowed all about it, I don't see why you're asking me then? Go on and read the riot act."

"What riot act?"

"The one that's been coming ever since I wrote you that note two weeks ago."

"Why, what was wrong with that note, Prawl? I thought it was the only respectful thing I ever had out of you. In fact, I've kept it as a curiosity."

Prawl stared at him, puzzled. Was Milton trying to be ironic?

"What do you mean by the riot act?" Milton repeated.

"Six months to mebbe a year."

The inspector looked sharply at his belligerent constable.

"Oh!" he said presently. "I see."

There was a silence of half a minute between them.

"Prawl," the inspector said abruptly, "you're the toughest problem I ever had on my hands. I'm mighty glad to be getting rid of you. But before I read what you call the riot act, I'm going to admit a couple things."

Admit! A funny word for Milton to use,

Prawl thought. Probably sugar-coating the sentence.

"I thought surely you would desert from Coyote Creek," the inspector went on. "But you didn't. I thought you would lay down on your job there, but you did the work—and then some. You handled that outpost the best it ever was handled. So I'll admit I misjudged you.

"I'll go further: I didn't give you a square deal before you went to Coyote Creek. It wasn't altogether my fault. I didn't maliciously try to ride you, but your bluntness and discourtesy made me overlook your strong points. It set a bad example to boot.

"Now before we proceed to the riot act, I want to square this personal matter between you and me. On my part, I admit I didn't use much tact or understanding in handling you. When I hinted in my message that you hadn't done your patroling well, I was wrong and I admit it. What have you got to say on your part?"

Prawl looked out of the window, thinking hard. There was no doubting Milton's sincerity now. He felt that his officer's desire to square things personally was not merely an effort to sugar-coat the bitter pill that was coming, but was a candid, honest admission.

"Since you come out in the open, I'll come out too," he answered slowly. "Larett used to tell me I was bull-headed and too hot and hasty. And this summer I've done some thinking on my own hook. I'll go halfway. You admit I done my work, so I'll apologize for that note I sent."

"Look here," Milton said, frowning. "That note—it was the thing which started me to thinking I'd misjudged you. But let that go. I'm glad we're squared personally. Now, the riot act.

"Article one: I intend to report your going to Sitting Bull's camp and making him give up the Chippewas. That was the nerviest job I've seen done since I've been C. O. here.

"Article two: I intend to report your turning back those buffalo. Of course that job of yours was not the whole cause, but it certainly started the ball to rolling. Here's the point: The Sioux got it in their heads, after your trick, that us Mounted were deliberately trying to starve them. They decided to clear out right now.

"Article three: I'm going to send you north with Larett to his new post. We've been talking you over. We think it's best for you to get off on your right foot in new surroundings. So Larett's taking you with him—if you want to go."

Prawl saw the inspector's hand outstretched to him. After a dazed moment, it dawned upon him that his buck-cop generalship had been decisive; that Milton, behind the cover of "the riot act," had paid him a tribute; was giving him full credit, and extending him the hand of cordial friendship.

SOME minutes later he found his way out of the cabin. Larett was waiting for him.

"Well," the sergeant grinned, "are you going north with me, Bing? I'll need some non-coms. likely, but I won't stand for 'em firing notes at me as hot as that one you fired at Milton."

"I ought to have got six months for that," Prawl acknowledged. "But, the honest truth, Larett, he said that note was—"

"I know what he said about it. I ought to. Why so? D'you think I'd allow anything like that go to —— of yours to get past me? I thought I'd see if a little common sense wouldn't start things in the right direction. So I rewrote your note. Put in a "please" and a "respectfully."

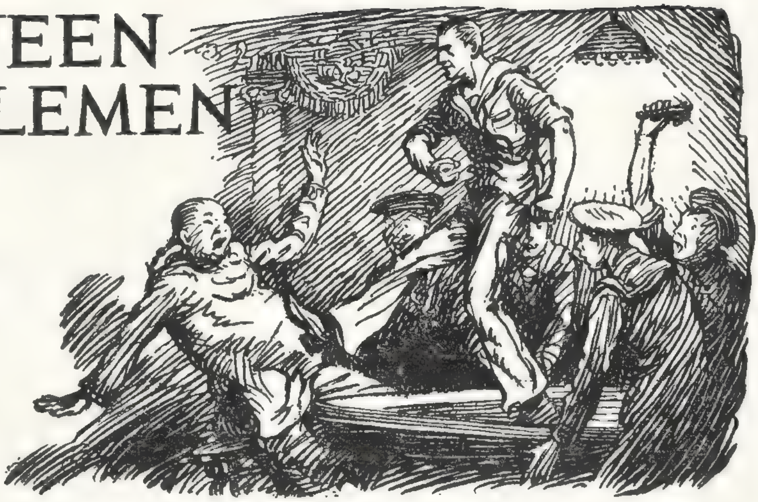
Prawl started to say something, but Larett stopped him tersely.

"Hobble it! You don't owe me anything. But over there behind that third tent there's a red-haired, fire-eating, cantankerous trooper that you do owe a spanking good idea to. He reminds me of you a lot. And from what his captain told Milton, he's going to get the same sort of disciplining as Milton just gave you."

BETWEEN GENTLEMEN

by

CHARLES VICTOR FISCHER



Author of "Frog," "Cash Jack," etc.

WHEN the big armored cruiser *Wingham* crossed the bar off Woosung and pointed her gigantic nose northward into the whitecaps and curlers of the Yellow Sea—bound from Shanghai, China to Fusan, Korea—there were many sick and sorry American bluejackets on her dizzy decks. Soured stomachs, shaky nerves and pain-filled heads there were, and socks galore with only feet and ankles in them, nearly every one of the *Wingham's* six hundred gobs having "shot his roll" in Shanghai.

"They're a forlorn looking gang," said "Madcap" Buckburn, the captain, his strong, furrowed and swarthy face and dark eyes grinning down into the rotund, blue-eyed and happy-go-lucky countenance of his executive officer, Lieutenant-Commander Warwick.

They stood up at the port bridge-wing rail—the captain, tall, wide-shouldered and straight as an Indian, towering above his executive by a neck and a head; the younger officer, however, being of much greater girth and paunch. Both wore long, glistening rubber coats and southwesters, for the air was heavy with the misty lingerings of the icy sprays that gushed up over the bows with each pitch and scend of the ship and came hissing aft across the forecastle. It was a murky, dark gray afternoon, with a cold, penetrating headwind that turned lips purple, made eyes water and teeth rattle.

Abaft of the bridge and below them, down on the superstructure deck or topside, about half of the sick and sorry crew crouched, sprawled and huddled about, some in the lee of the conning-tower, bridge and charthouse, some behind the four smokestacks, ventilators, hammock nettings or in the cradled boats; all benumbed, blue and chattering with the cold, but preferring the cold to the stuffiness of the decks below.

"But it's good for them," Madcap went on. "Candidly, they're my idea of an aggregation of sailors. I can not understand and do not want to understand this ultra-modern jelly-fish of an American bluejacket. If some of those chair-warming fanatics in Washington had their way, they'd turn the American Navy into a sort of Bible class for pink-skinned and short-headed lollypop suckers and lemonade sippers with water in their veins and jelly in their backbones! They make me see red, the little fatheads! "Look at that fellow—"

He broke off, pointing down aft at a hatless youngster in a pea-jacket who hung belly over the rail, holding violent and convulsive communion with the water that surged and foamed against the ship's side.

"Watch me scare blue blazes out of him," said Madcap.

Lifting a megaphone to his mouth, in a voice that would have dimmed the snort of a red-eyed bull to a cat's purr, he roared—

"Below, there!"

Giggles rose from all over the topside and mingled with the moan of the wind. The gob at the lee-rail, one "Static" Hastings, a radioman, second class, turned forward and upward a face that was green and ghastly and sad. Normal, in full vigor of his five feet and nine inches of muscular and symmetrical manhood, Static was a fine looking young tar. He had a clean-cut face, brown from the sun, curly dark hair and gray eyes that could look straight. But he looked nothing like that today.

"What are you doing!" Madcap bawled down.

"Feeding the fish, suh," was the wofully weak-voiced but prompt reply.

"Well, carry on!" Madcap flung back down. "Next time request permission!"

The old boy must have his little joke. He grinned at his executive officer and went on:

"I repeat, Warwick, it's good for them. I'm here to contend before the whole cockeyed world that none of us is any the worse for a little fling of excess now and then—within reasonable limits, of course. Take that lad down there. His work has been none too good of late. About half the messages he has received have come to me with the words 'reception doubtful' written across the top. When he's right, there isn't a more proficient operator in the service. He can work through static when it's roaring, sit right down and copy when all the rest of 'em throw up both hands. But he hasn't been right for more than a month. Why? He'd been staying aboard, hadn't been ashore before we ran up to Shanghai, I understand, in about four months."

"Five, sir," the executive corrected. "I think he and another lad had a bet between them, to see which could stay aboard the longer."

"Uh-huh. And that's the how-come of all those 'reception doubtful' messages of his. He'd been aboard too long. But watch him from now on. He'll come out of it and be on the peak of efficiency for the rest of his cruise."

"That won't be for long, sir," the executive observed. "Hastings has only about two months left to serve. By the way, I've heard he got a pretty bad trimming in the house of that Chinaman, Charlie Wang, during this last stay at Shanghai."

Madcap turned and glared at him.

"On that crap table?"

"Yes, sir. So I've been told."

"RECEPTION doubtful, eh?" Static drawled as the wind hurled Madcap's words down into his ears. "Where the blazes does th' old fool get that racket, shootin' off his dawg-gone bazoo jest 'cause a fellah falls off in his receivin' ability once in a while?" And glaring up at the skipper and the executive, who both grinned down at him, Static felt an overwhelming urge to punch both their faces. "Wha's funny?" he growled under his breath. "Is a man dyin' somethin' to laugh at?"

"Get it up, lad, get it up," Madcap shouted.

"Go to ——!" Static thought.

The instinct of self-preservation kept him from uttering it.

Get it up! It wouldn't come up! By all the known laws of cause and effect, there must be something down there causing all his inner turmoil. His stomach was in terrific and nauseous revolt. But heave as Static would, all that came up was enthusiasm.

A shipmate, huddled on deck behind the second smokestack, squeaked the suggestion that Static try a piece of raw liver on a string.

"Jest swaller it an' pull it up again. Keep doin' that."

"A drink o' soap suds is good," stated another.

Then still another let fly what was decidedly a "bum crack."

"How much of a pay-day have you got left now, Static?"

It was a dirty crack! Static whirled about, for a moment glaring in green-faced and speechless rage.

"You dawg-gone di'ty bunch of pelicans!"

A lurch of the ship sent him staggering aft. He kept on going, passed the last of the four stacks, finally tumbling into a sheltered nook down behind a spud-locker. Here, free from the brayings of those jackasses, he could lie and recuperate, he thought, for a few hours at least, till it came time for him to go on watch in the radio office. He had the eight to twelve that evening.

But go where a gentleman sailor and a lover of good whisky will, he can't escape from his conscience. That last flippantly flung query was one below the belt. It was adding gross insult to gross injury, heaping misery upon torment. Pay-day left! The words buzzed so loudly in Static's head that he couldn't hear the moan and roar of wind and wave. Pay-day left! That was the worst of this whole miserable aftermath of his ten days furlough in Shanghai—he had no pay-day left!

In this sense, pay-day means homeward-bound stake.

BEFORE the *Wingham's* arrival at Shanghai, Static had possessed, in safe keeping with the paymaster, seventeen hundred dollars. It was money he had put aside in lump sums from time to time, every now and then when the dice spoke right or when good poker hands came his way.

He was an inveterate gambler, this boy Static. It was in the root and stock of him. Born in Kentucky, he came of a long ancestral line of chance-takers and lovers of good whisky. He would bet on anything, from a cock fight up to the election of a president. He would shoot craps or play poker till his socks were gone or he had all the socks in the game.

Thus had his seventeen-hundred-dollar homeward-bound stake gone. It happened in the house of one Charlie Wang, a slant-eyed provider of amusement in Shanghai.

This Charlie Wang catered specially to American bluejackets. He knew gobs, having been an American admiral's cook years before. Among other means of diversion in his house was a large green-covered table, made especially for the purpose of shooting craps on. It was a construction of ingenuity, that table. It was of the shape of a triangle with a rounded base, with a rubber fence all around, against which the dice had to be thrown. At the apex end in a high chair Charlie Wang presided. He covered all bets. The house faded everything. He had an assistant to pick up the dice—huge dice an inch square they were, of green celluloid—and toss them back to the player shooting.

There Static had lost his pay-day. Dawg-gone! Static firmly believed now that there was no such thing as luck. He believed in disaster. The first afternoon's play at Wang's table cost him two hundred dollars and sent him scudding back to the ship with his tail between his legs, but with the light of resolve flaming high. He drew more of his homeward-bound roll from the paymaster, and fared forth again for Wang's place. That was the beginning. Being on furlough he could come and go as he pleased. He did come and go till his seventeen hundred was gone.

"I did that for the good of the service," the paymaster said to his four yeomen after handing Static his last two hundred and shooing him out. "If he goes broke he'll have to ship over, and he's a good man in the service."

With the passing of that two hundred into the coffers of Wang, Static had rambled about the city borrowing from shipmates enough to submerge the worry of it all and keep the worry of it all submerged for the remainder of his furlough.

Nothing remained now but to ship over. And that was the one thing Static Hastings did not want to do. Not that he was in the least soured on the Navy. On the contrary he liked the service. It was a fine outfit to kill four wild young years in, with its opportunities for travel, fun, adventure. Good education. More, it rendered a fellow able to hold his head up in after years. Static wouldn't have traded his war record for a seat in Congress. But as for shipping over—well, he had other plans.

Over on the other side of the world, in the State of blue grass and "hosses" and good "hoo-whisky," a mighty fine little girl named Lou was waiting for Static's return. She should have been waiting with a brick in each hand. He rated it. And what's more, Static knew he deserved being bricked over the head.

"Dawg-gone!" he groaned as he lay there behind the spud-locker, staring up into the gathering dusk. "Of all the diseased brains what should be in lunatic asylums and ain't! Seventeen hund'ed good American dollahs—dawg-gone—to a dirty slant-eyed pelican what's got a pigtail an' a yellow belly an' ain't got no right undeh the dawg-gone sun bein' anywhehs else essept in a laundry washin' otheh people's clothes!"

GOING on watch that evening was a struggle for Static. He was really too unwell to be assuming the responsibilities of a radio operator on a big cruiser, and he stated so to "Turk" Hannegan, the operator he was relieving. But Turk not even fluttered an eyelash. He had known the betrayal of compassion, under similar conditions, to rope more than one man in for a secret. He had finished his four-hour trick, and had another one coming up at four o'clock next morning, which left him exactly eight hours to sleep in, and he needed every minute of them. So the phones were transferred from Turk's curly red head to Static's curly brown one.

"You got a whole hour to get yourself together before Cavite starts her broadcast," Turk muttered grumpily.

Staring straight ahead of him, Static drawled—

"Ah takes back what Ah said th' otheh day."

Turk halted in the doorway.

"What?"

"Fellah was arguin' you ain't got no haht. Ah disagreed with him. Cain't say Ah do now."

Turk shifted his weight to the other leg.

"But I'm sick meself, Static! I can't stand your watch!"

Sniffing disdainfully, looking down at Turk's shoes, Static shot back:

"Who asked you to? You dawg-gone pelican!" He paused, then went on, "Any man who ain't got sense enough to offeh to take anotheh man's watch when he knows in his dawg-gone haht an' soul that said otheh man is dyin' on his pins—no, suh, he ain't no better than a niggeh. An' down wheh Ah come from we throws niggehs off the tops of houses."

With which Static turned and began tuning on the receiving set. The ether was loud with sing-song dots and dashes of ships sending on the 600-meter wave length. They hurt his ears. He swung off on to 1200 meters. Japs. Nothing but that long drawn out and unintelligible Japanese naval code.

"Dawg-gone yellow bellies," he growled, throwing over a small switch that disconnected the phones from the short-wave receiver and connected them with the long-wave one.

He tuned in the high-powered arc of the naval radio station at Pearl Harbor, Oahu. Though four thousand miles distant, Pearl Harbor's signals came in clear and strong, and Static could have easily copied the broadcast. He didn't.

"'Tain't nothin' but stale press news anyhow," he mumbled, and just sat there.

The door slammed shut. It opened again. Static turned. Turk thrust in his red head.

"Say, Static," he said hurriedly, "I forgot to tell you there's a nip in the bottle in the drawer of the desk." And *bang* went the door.

A nip!

"Tha's the fi'st sensible thing Ah eveh did heah that fellah say," Static muttered, pulling out the drawer at his left.

But the first thing his groping hand closed over was not a bottle. There was a Colt pistol in that drawer, and it had been there for some time. A few months before, down in the Philippines, one of the radio force had been detailed in a landing party. He had drawn the pistol from the ordnance department as a part of his equipment and had neglected to return it upon returning aboard. Static was not surprized, having seen it before. He merely looked at it for a moment, noting that it was loaded, then slid it to one side on the desk before him. Then he groped again for said bottle.

A nip! There were several nips in that pint bottle. It was more than half full. Static sat back, folding his hands over the bottle in his lap, wondering, speculating. Of one thing he was positive—it could make him feel no worse!

It didn't. At least not after those first few seconds of gulping and swallowing. The vitriolic stuff tore and gagged, well nigh sending him on the gallop for the quarter-deck rail; but he swallowed and held it. And then—ah, then! Static felt as like a new boy. The chill left his muscles; he felt warm and mellow. A sense of well-being crept over him. The sourness in his stomach was gone, and a light, ethereal, giddy optimism pervaded his head. He relaxed.

"Fas' heavin', sailo'," he said to the bottle. "A man is neveh dead till he is dead."

The second nip set him acrawl with ideas.

"Fi'st place," he soliloquized, "the ship'll be back in Shanghai about next pay-day, and they's nothing this side of cock-eyed —— to stop a fellah from wadin' back into said slant-eye's joint fo' satisfaction. Failin' in which, then Ah extends mah enlistment fo' one yeah."

He could do this, extend his enlistment for one year with the captain's approval.

"Le's see," he mused, taking a box of stationery out of the drawer at his left. "Reckon Ah'd betteh write Lou. Le's see." He paused, fountain pen poised. "They's no reasonable need fo' her to know all about these little irregularities. Less a woman knows, less a woman worries. Ah'll jes' say that the Navy Department has decided to boos' me up a peg. Ah'll say they've offehed me a commission provided Ah extends mah enlistment fo' one yeah, said extension of the yeah bein' fo' the purpose of givin' me an opportunity to educate mahself up to the rank. Jes' that."

He wrote:

> My Dear Lou:
> I deply regret that I must herewith write and tell you that it is my sincere intention to—

He stopped writing and sat listening. Clear and shrill, the high-powered arc of Pearl Harbor was whistling press news through those four thousand miles of ethereal space. Static read:

> New York.
> Sweetheart of doomed slayer One-Eyed Darcy writes to chief of police saying if Darcy is electrocuted she will commit suicide.

There Pearl Harbor's arc broke, and the dots and dashes ceased coming. Static was grinning now. What struck him as being funny was what he had just written. From force of habit he had begun copying that press item. Without paying heed to what he was doing, he had written those last two words, "commit suicide," at the end of his unfinished sentence to Lou, making it read—

> I deeply regret that I must herewith write and tell you that it is my sincere intention to commit suicide.

"Dawg-gone!" Static looked from the sheet of paper to that loaded Colt at his elbow. "S'pose—"

He said no more. For at that moment Static began feeling queer again. Those two drinks were not running true to form. Oh, boy! What nauseous and giddy distress deep down! His stomach felt full of snakes. He felt his jaw sag and some slight swimming of the head. He gulped, swallowed. No false alarm this! Up out of that chair shot Static. Out of the office and aft along the gun-deck he legged it for the quarter-deck rail.

EMPTY, but much wiser, Static returned to the radio-office fifteen minutes later. He was greenish and goat-like. But the instant he entered the office he snapped up to rigid and wide-eyed attention. The chief master-at-arms or chief of ship's police was there—"Gumshoe" Smuntz. He was a tall, lean, lizard-like roughneck with whom no one had ever been known to be friendly save for long enough to learn better. He had a long, dog-like face and small mean eyes that just now were regarding Static with a narrow and wicked look. In one hand he held that loaded Colt pistol; in the other, the letter Static had begun writing to Lou.

"Uh-huh. Ah see," said Static. His head went back and he looked Gumshoe straight in the eyes. "Down wheh Ah come from, the only people what sniffs into otheh people's business is niggehs. An' on ce'tain occasions we use them fo' fuel."

"That so?" the chief jimmy-legs grunted. He stepped over, took Static by the elbow and turned him about. "March."

"Ah'm on watch!"

"I know. I'll see that a relief gets here. Beat it."

Up to the bridge Gumshoe marched him. They fetched up before the officer of the deck. To him Gumshoe handed the pistol and the sheet of paper. The officer held the paper over to the light of the binnacle and read it. Meanwhile Gumshoe explained:

"I happened to look in the radio office, sir. Saw no one on watch, so I stepped in. The gun was on the desk. So was the sheet of paper—"

With great distinctness of pronunciation Static interposed:

"An' he proceeded to read what was written on the-e papeh, suh."

The officer bent over, peering into Static's face. "Oh, Hastings, eh? Well, what's the idea, anyway."

A short silence, then Static replied:

"Ah cain't say Ah ca'e to answeh any questions jes' now, suh."

"On advice of counsel, eh?" the officer chuckled. "All right. Here." He handed pistol and paper back to Gumshoe. "Take this affair back to the captain."

It was Static's first time in Madcap's cabin. He was deeply impressed with the magnificence of the room. Every way he looked he saw mahogany, green-shaded lamps, deep velvet. The room was the full breadth of the ship and of slightly greater length than that. It was truly the lair of a sea lord. Portraits of bygone ships with great ballooning sails as well as of bygone heroes who had commanded them hung all about on the pea-green bulkheads, and also looked up out of the mirror-like linoleum deck.

In which august presence Static felt a shrinkage of ego. He stood there at shaky-kneed attention. Gumshoe, beside him, had just finished explaining things to Madcap. The captain sat in a deep chair, the Colt pistol in his lap, reading that incriminating sentence with which Static had begun his letter to Lou. Having finished with this, he took up the pistol and examined it. When finally he looked up at Static there was a kindly but piercing gleam in his powerful dark eyes.

"Lad," he said, "just what is your trouble? Feeling pretty bad?"

Static pulled himself together and answered. He answered at length, as was his wont.

"Ah feel as mah fatheh used to feel eve'y mawning of his life, suh." He stiffened. "He used to feel as a gentleman should feel in the mawning. He felt like ——, suh. An' tha's how Ah feel now, suh."

Madcap's dark, furrowed face worked queerly for a moment. But he swallowed his laugh.

"Lad, I do not doubt that your father was a gentleman," he said slowly, in low, conciliatory tones. "And I know you're one." He paused, meeting Static's gaze. "But between us, as gentleman to gentleman, understand—"

"Pahdon mah interruption, suh." Static gave Gumshoe a sidelong and downward sweep of his eyes. "It so happens that the radio operato' on watch was taken away from his duty, without any relief bein' detailed in his place. Whehfo' they is no one on watch at the present moment in the radio office."

Gumshoe shot Static a glare, and Madcap shot him one.

"Go forward and tell the radio chief to detail a man on watch," snapped the captain. "You should have done that in the first place."

"Aye aye, sir. I—well, you see, sir," Gumshoe faltered.

"Beat it," Madcap cut him off.

"An' tha's one thing mah fatheh neveh would stand fo'," Static said after Gumshoe had ignominiously quitted the cabin, "havin' any niggehs around listening in when he was conve'sing with some otheh gentleman, suh."

"Uh-huh. Well, what I want to know is, have you any suicidal notions?"

"No, suh. This whole thing is nothin' mo' than a li'le freak of coincidence, tha's all, suh. Said gun happened to be in the drawer of said desk. Shouldn't 've been. Ah jes' nachly happened to pull it out when Ah reached in fo' a box of stationery to write mah gi'l a letteh. Meanwhile, Pea'l Ha'bo' opens up an' broadcast some press."

And, omitting the bottle of whisky, Static explained.

"Ah will admit, suh," he added, "that Ah was feelin' pretty tough. They was cogent an' logical cause. Ah had lost seventeen hund'ed dollahs, suh, to a dawg-gone, slant-eyed, Mongolian rat what's loweh in the human scale than a niggeh, an'—"

"Now! Right there!"

Madcap arose and walked over to his desk. Pulling out a drawer, he took something from it.

"Come over here, lad," he said, sitting down at the desk. "Take a look at this."

IN THE palm of his right hand he held one of those huge dice of green celluloid; just such a dice as had been haunting Static's mind for days. In his left hand he held a small horseshoe magnet.

"That looks ezzactly like one of that yellow belly's dice, suh."

"It is." Madcap pointed to a chair close by. "Sit down there, lad," he added, crossing his legs.

"In the first place," Madcap began, "I've had my eye on that Charlie Wang's place for some time. I've watched him come aboard every time we've anchored at Shanghai and sing his song to you fellows about all the fun you can have in his place. I've known too that the big attraction in his place has been the big table with the covering of green silk and the rubber-cushioned fences along the sides. From the stories floating about decks, I felt that you fellows must be getting it in the neck from that chink, but up till yesterday I was unable to figure out just how. I'd been in the place myself and looked his layout over. Everything appeared regular, on the level. Still I was unsatisfied because I knew that no man can gamble on the level and win all the time, and that's what that chink was doing."

He handed the large die to Static.

"Take a look at that. I had my yeoman steal it from Wang's table."

Static turned the big cube over, held it up to the light.

"Looks O.K., suh. Perfectly squa'e. An' it's transparent. Ah've examined Wang's dice mo' than once, suh. An' the fact of them bein' so nice an' big has always made me so't of like to shoot craps on his table, suh. Yes, suh, this gallopin' domino looks perfectly regular to me, suh."

Madcap pointed a finger at him.

"Don't you fool yourself, lad. Here—" holding out the small horseshoe magnet—"hold this magnet to the four-spot of that die."

Static did so.

"Dawg-gone!" The big die stuck fast to one of the magnet's poles. "Tha's the fi'st time I eveh knowed celluloid to be magnetic, suh!"

Static sat looking foolishly down at the die and magnet. It required considerable of a pull to separate them. He then held the magnet's pole to all the other sides of the die, to the ace, two, three, five and six. There was no attraction.

"Simple enough." And Madcap elucidated. "Embedded in all four cavities on that side of the die, the four-spot side, are tiny concave shells of almost paper-like slivers of iron. They're nothing more than iron filings, probably, hammered out flat and then stamped into the die's depressions. But they render that side of the die susceptible to the pull of a magnet. They're covered over with white paint, of course, and that side looks like all the others. But look close and you'll see one tiny bright speck where I scraped off the paint."

Static nodded affirmation and drawled:

"Nevehtheless and notwithstanding, suh, Ah still fail to pe'ceive jes' ezzactly how Ah lost ma seventeen hund'ed dollahs. Ah wouldn't call this a loaded bone in the ordinary sense of that term. They load dice with quicksilveh. These tiny shells of iron on the four-side of this domino ain't going to make it stop on the fou'. They don't make it any heavier on that side than any otheh, suh."

"No heavier, no, lad. But those tiny shells of iron do make that side magnetic, lad."

"But Ah fail to see ezzactly—"

"Suppose the mate to this die—which unfortunately we haven't got—is similarly doctored, but on the three-spot instead, the side opposite the four-spot. Now suppose you rolled that pair of dice over a smooth flat surface that was powerfully magnetized."

"Why, they would stop on a three-fou' seven, suh—a fou' up an' a three down on one bone, an' a three up an' a fou' down on the otheh. An'—dawg-gone!"

Static abruptly became perspiring and wild-eyed with new found intelligence.

"Tha's jes' how we done lost out to that slant-eye, suh! On a fou'-three seven! Yes, suh! Eve'y time Ah was rollin' fo' real money, an' had a point to make, suh, those dice would stop on a fou' and a tray! But how, suh—"

"It's the table, lad, the table! There's the way that chink has been pulling you fellows' legs. Don't you see? And you an electrician? Underneath that silk covering of his table, lad, are big slabs of sheet iron. Under the slabs of iron are spools, spools and spools, wound with magnet wire, probably each of them with a bundle of iron wires for a core, all of these joined to the slabs of sheet iron that make the table top. The whole forms a huge electromagnet. Simple as two and two. Leave it to a Chinaman to devise ways of fooling a white man! You see, lad, he has only to switch the current on those coils, and the whole table top is alive with magnetism. He turns off the current, and the table top is the same as any other table top."

Static came up out of his chair.

"Ezzactly, suh! I got yo', suh! An' that's jes' which happens, suh! A man lays down his money. Wang covehs it. The man rolls the bones. Gets a point to make. He rolls along, prayin' fo' his point to come an' the seven to stay away. Then that dawg-gone slant-eye pushes said button, wheheveh 'tis, turns the current on said coils, said coils magnetize the sheet iron surface of the table an', dog bite yo', cat scratch yo', said bones stop with a three up and a fou' down and vice versa. An' tha's jes how Ah lost mah seventeen hund'ed dollahs!"

A few seconds of silence. Then Static added in much lower tones—

"But tha's not the complete story, suh."

He paused, with a sinister look in his fine gray eyes.

"Go ahead," Madcap encouraged.

"Well, suh, down wheh Ah come from we throw things which ain't no use to humanity off roofs. The room in which this yellow belly has got his magnetic crap table is on the fifth floor of the building, suh, an' tha's a fair-sized fall."

Madcap shook his head slowly from side to side.

"Heaving that Chinaman out of his own window isn't going to bring back your seventeen hundred dollars, lad."

"Tha's a fac', suh," Static concurred, looking glumly down at his shoes.

"You've got to play that chink and beat him at his own game. You've got to work a substitution stunt on him. In the first place the mate to this die is, we've assumed, doctored on its three-spot side instead of on the four-spot as this one is. Your game is to steal one of those mates to this one, and substitute this one in its place, so that the dice in play won't be mates but—well, brothers, we'll call 'em. They'll both be fixed on the four-spot sides. But could you do that?"

"Reckon Ah could, if Ah was rollin', suh. But Ah fail to see ezzactly—"

"If you steal the mate to this one and put this one in its place, then that'll leave both dice in the game fixed to stop with their four-spots down and their three-spots up. When Wang pushes his button and magnetizes his table top, instead of a four and a tray showing up, two trays will show up—a six. Then if you're rolling and your point is six, you'll win, won't you?"

"Yes, suh. But tha's only fo' that roll. It wouldn't work mo' than a couple of times, befo' that slant-eye would shift bones."

"One roll of the dice is enough to bring back your seventeen hundred dollars, if you've got seventeen hundred dollars up on that roll. What's Wang's limit for one single bet?"

"Don't think he has any limit, suh. Ah saw one man shoot as high as three thousand dollahs, suh. But s'pose, suh, that Ah get in said game, that Ah get muh six fo' a point, that Ah work said shift, suh. Tha's easy enough. Then Ah'm all set to roll a pair of trays the moment yellow belly pushes said button and magnetizes his table. But the painful point is, suh, Ah cain't figueh out jes' wheh Ah'm goin' get seventeen hund'ed dollahs to be shootin' jes' ezzactly at that moment."

"But could you do it, work that shift?"

"Ah wouldn't be hanged fo' not tryin,' suh."

Madcap stood up.

"Beat it," he said. "Get out of here. Go back to the radio office and relieve the poor fellow that's getting roped in for your watch."

IT CAME like a bomb out of a clear blue sky in that it came when Charlie Wang was least expecting it. Like an emperor on his throne, the little Chinaman sat there on his high stool at the head or apex end of his large triangular table, his black silken robe a mass of shimmering ruffles and folds, and his bald head shining like a yellow billiard ball in the glow of the overhead electric lights. All he did was push out money and pull in more money. He covered all bets. He was a very happy Charlie Wang. He lost at times, but oftener he won. Steadily the stacks of green and yellow American money before him on the green silk of the table had grown in height, and with their growing Wang's twisted, pinched and slant-eyed Mongolian features had waxed more hideous with grinning happiness.

It had been a banner evening for Mr. Wang. The big American cruiser *Wingham* had returned to Shanghai from Fusan. Her gobs had been paid that day, and they were letting loose of their cash in true gob fashion. The big room was loud with the clink of glass and the roar of voices hilarious with beer. An uninterrupted stream of American nickels kept the automatic piano clattering. Pig-tailed waiters slouched from table to table, filling orders. Over behind the bar Wang's cash register was hitting on all six. The room off to one side, which was a restaurant, Wang's, had been doing a thriving business all afternoon and evening in smothered steaks, fried chicken, broiled lobsters and oysters in every style.

But nearing midnight there came a slump in all these side issues, and the general interest centered more on the large crap table. Here, packed elbow to elbow and two deep, two score of gobs, some with the sleeves of their jumpers rolled up, some with their jumpers off, made frantic and vicious attempts to win portions of that fortune stacked up before Mr. Wang.

One of those was Static Hastings. But the boy from Kentucky was playing with unwonted caution tonight. Each time the dice came to him Static shot one dollar. If he won, he "dragged," and then shot another dollar. Which is no way to either win much or lose much, as any one versed in this fascinating game will tell you.

"Ah'm playin' close to mah belly, till Ah gets mah lucky feelin'," Static enlightened his shipmates.

But apparently that lucky feeling was a long time coming. The few one-dollar bills Static held between his fingers neither increased nor grew fewer. He just about held his own.

One peculiar little act of Static's might have been noted by a keenly observant eye. Every time the man at his right lost the dice, which he did most times on a three-four seven, before reaching out to pick them up and take his turn at rolling, Static thrust his right forefinger in his mouth. With that forefinger he moistened one of the dice—the one that had stopped with its four-spot up. For that was the bone he must steal and replace by the one he held in his left palm, the bone he had brought from the ship.

But before making this shift, you see, he must first get six for his point. And it was a long time coming, that six. That is, in just the right moment. He rolled sixes galore, but always after he already had some other point, a five, eight or ten. When he was "coming out" for a point those bones refused to stop on six.

SOMEWHERE near dawn it was, when for about the hundredth time the man at Static's right lost the dice on a three-four seven. And for about the hundredth time Static licked his forefinger, before reaching out to scoop in the dice. Once more he moistened the bone with its four-spot up. Holding the dice aloft in his right hand, with his left he tossed another one-dollar bill toward Wang. The little Chinaman's withered face opened out in an indifferent yawn, as he stripped a dollar from one of his stacks and covered it. He looked very tired and bored.

"Hey, you sailo'man, why for you no shootee leal money," he complained. "All time one dollah, one dollah!"

"Is tha' so?" Static drawled, and then sent the bones across the table. They bounced back from the rubber-cushioned fence and stopped with a four and a two up.

"Dawg-gone!" Static snapped to life.

"Six him point," chanted Wang. "Who gottee money say him make six? House pay. How muchee?"

Static leaned over the table and scooped in the dice. As he straightened up, he appeared to transfer the dice to his left hand. But he transferred only one of them, the dry bone, The moistened bone he retained in his right fist. He covered the shift by holding out his left palm in which were two dice, thus drawing attention toward that one, while his right he let fall down below the table top and there steal unnoticed to his trouser-pocket depositing therein the stolen bone. Then he put both hands up to his flat hat.

"House pay," repeated Wang. "Who gottee money say him make six?"

One man laid out a dollar, another two. Wang covered both.

"Don't be in any hurry, Mistuh Wang." Static took off his flat hat and laid it bottom-up on the table. "Ah reckon Ah got some real money he'e, which says Ah'll make said six."

Out of his hat he took two thick stacks of yellow bills and began shuffling them together. Then moistening his thumb, he began stripping and counting them off.

"Where the —— did you get it?" growled a voice across the table.

Static paused, shot him a glare, then went on counting and peeling off yellow-backs. He peeled off and counted out two thousand dollars, all in twenty-dollar bills.

"Ah reckon Ah didn't steal it," he made reply to his inquisitive shipmate. "Maybe Ah borrowed it. Ain't sayin' Ah didn't borrow it from the captain. If Ah did—well, tha's jes' a li'le affai' between gentlemen."

Reaching far out over the table, the boy from Kentucky laid his huge stack of yellow bills before Wang's burning little eyes. Those little eyes glittered and narrowed. The Chinaman's bald head seemed to take on a higher polish as he began counting off twenty-dollar bills from his own stack. Meanwhile Static picked up the bones and began shaking them over his right shoulder.

"You waitee I get money down!" Wang paused in his count to fling at him.

"Yes, suh," Static beamed on him. "Ah'll ce'tainly do that, suh." He chuckled. "Ah fully intend to give yo' all the chance in the wo'ld to set in motion those fo'ces of electro magnetic phenomenon which will make said dominoes stop gallopin' wheh they should stop."

The gobs crowded about the table quickly caught the contagion of Static's superb confidence. They began tossing bills and bills up toward Wang. All of a sudden there was a "hen on," as the saying is, something stirring, a "coon in the heap." Every one felt it or sensed it. Before Wang could finish counting his two thousand dollars to cover Static's money, there fell on the green silk before him a very shower of twos, fives, tens and twenties. He became a very busy little Chinaman.

"You waitee getee allee money down!" he shouted excitedly at Static, and went on covering bet after bet.

"Yes, suh," Static responded genially. "Ah sure am waitin', Mistuh Wang." To the crowd he added, "An' what Ah mean to remahk is jes' this—any of you fellahs that don't get you' money down now is jes' downright fools."

Mr. Wang now made a move. It was so vague that scarcely could it be called a move. While his right hand was still busy covering bets, his left stole beneath the table. It wasn't under there for longer than one second, but the move didn't escape Static.

The boy from Kentucky now made a move. Reaching across the table, with a finger of his left hand he flicked away a tiny speck of dirt off the green silk over near the rubber-cushioned fence.

"Ah jes' want to give these dominoes a clean road to gallop over," he explained his act. But the truth was, he was feeling the surface of the table for magnetism, by means of a small steel ring he wore on his little left finger.

"Yes, suh!" Static's tone was pronounced, emphatic. "They's one man in this wo'ld who is no man's fool, an' tha's Madcap Buckburn. Put down you' money, fools! By all the laws governing the theory of electromagnetism, Ah cain't lose!"

"Shoot! Roll 'em, Static, roll 'em!" his shipmates urged.

"You waitee!" Wang had a few bets more to cover.

Static was rattling the dice together over his right shoulder, chanting what sounded like a prayer.

"Madcap be thy name," it went. "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on this crap table as it is in the State of blue grass an' ho'ses and cawn hoo-whisky. Dog bite yo', cat scratch yo'. A bird in the hand gathehs no moss. Let he who is without sin cas' the fi'st brick. Blessings on thee, little bones, go an' bring mah money home. An' that Ah do claim is some poetry. Hot dawg! Here they go!"

He sent the two big cubes galloping across the green silk. They thudded against the rubber cushion and bounced back, one stopping instantly with its three-spot on top, the other continuing to spin on one corner, in that tantalizing way dice have of doing when real money is up and all eyes around are wide and bulging with expectancy. It spun and spun. Then abruptly, as if sucked down to the table by some powerful vacuum force, it stopped.

TWO seconds of deathlike silence, and then there went up such a roar as you hear at a World Series game when, with the bases full and two out, Walter Johnson fans the batter. The dominoes had galloped true to form. Static had rolled his six.

Static's next move was an unexpected one. Without giving the crooked Chinaman a chance to reach under the table and switch off the magnetizing current, the boy from Kentucky jumped up on the table and thrust out one foot. Had Wang been quick with his hands, he might have caught that foot on the fly and set Static down on his haunches. But instead the Mongolian caught it full against his chest, and down over backwards he went, high stool and all.

"'Tention, gentlemen, if you please!" Static shouted. "Don't let any yellow belly neah this table!"

But they scarcely heard him, so busy scooping in their money were they. Static stooped down and picked up his four-thousand-dollar stack, then his flat hat. Then standing there in the center of the table he waited for the racket to subside, the while he tucked away his wealth.

"Ah reckon the captain ain't aimin' to have me mix in any roughhouse," he went on. "An' Ah ain't aimin' to go back on mah word to said gentleman. Tha's jes' what this is—an affai' between gentlemen. Yes, suh."

Pointing down to the two dice which lay at his feet with their three-spots on top, he continued—

"Pick 'em up an' learn something."

With which he drew forth and let fall the bone he had stolen. It bounded and rolled over near the other two, stopping with its four-spot on top.

Static then jumped down off the table.

"Body-guahd front and centeh!" Static had to shout to make himself heard, for the crowd about the table were now snarling and growling like so many dogs over a bone as they examined the doctored dice and the magnetized table top.

Static's body-guard of four marines came at his call. This quartet had escorted him ashore the afternoon before. They were on duty. Each wore a Colt pistol under his coat. Madcap Buckburn wasn't sending two thousand dollars ashore wild. Not in Shanghai.

"Reckon we better jes' go," Static said to the marines. "No use us waitin' around while those fellahs rip said table apaht. The's goin' be —— poppin'. Yes, suh. In less minutes than a goat's got tails. Captain told me not to mix in any roughhouse. Gave 'im mah word Ah wouldn't. 'Greement's an agreement. Yes, suh. Between gentlemen."

THREE MARGINAL NOTES

By F. R. Buckley

EXAMINED, for what they purport to be, the documents of the middle ages—even the death-warrants, the *lettres de cachet*, and similar dramatic instruments—are rather disappointing. They are, usually, the productions of machine-like professional scribes, following fixed legal forms from which the gravity of the matter dealt with forbids them to deviate; and a certain impersonal quality clings to them with the dust of the centuries.

It is in the more informal documents—minutes of parliamentary meetings, transcripts of ducal or royal addresses and the like—that one finds the precious traces of humanity, as distinct from history. These minutes and transcripts were made by clerks, corresponding to our modern reporters, who, like newspaper men of the present day, made notes of the salient points of the proceedings and, between salients, yawned and scribbled on their note-parchment.

One of them, reporting the speech of a mighty Italian duke to a captured city, begins by enumerating the Duke's titles, quite unnecessarily; tires of this sport, and ends them abruptly with "Count Skew-Nose, Emperor of hell."

In 1410, when Paris was in extreme danger of capture, the King took time by the forelock and stationed a company of soldiers in the courts of justice, to protect the archives of the kingdom in case of need. The clerk in charge of the records—probably a wizened, black-gowned legal underling of fifty or so—was perfectly disgusted. He foresaw confusion thrice confounded. "Innumerable papers relative to suits turned topsy-turvy, tumbled about, torn and lost, to the unutterable confusion of all, of all conditions, within this Kingdom." On his own initiative, he sourly had the entrance to the turrets in question walled up. Having done this, he returned to his parchment and sourly wrote, "*In armigero vix potest vigere ratio*," translatable as, "Who ever heard of a soldier having any brains?" More sourly then ever, he drew a caricature of a man-at-arms on the margin.

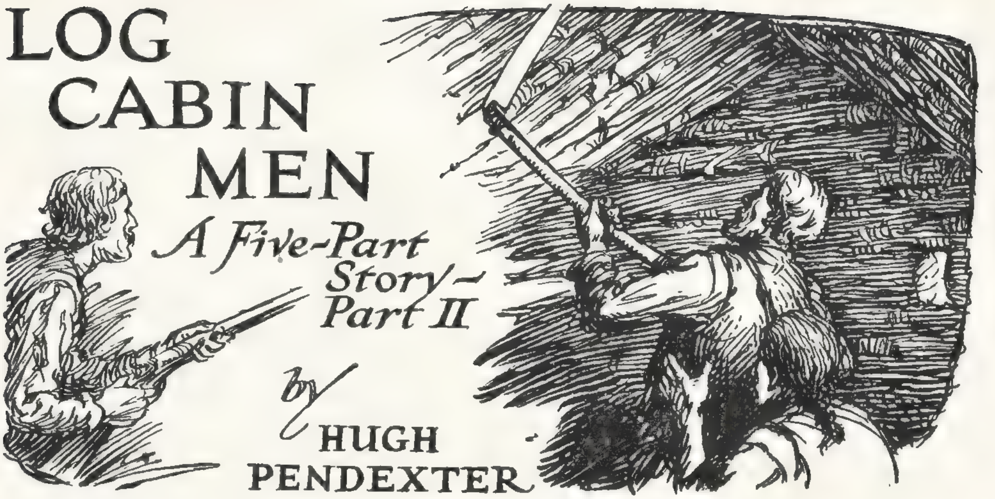
The registers of Parliament contain many such marginal notes; one of a singularly durable pathos. It was made during another period of feudal change, a period of lying, plotting, treachery and fighting for the barons, and of death by steel, rope and starvation, for the common folk. In the midst of it the King, following a common royal custom, made an address on the prospects for peace. He talked a great deal, and said very little; the clerk reporting him had plenty of time to scribble. And, being one of the common people in spite of his knowledge of Latin, one thing he scribbled was a quotation, "*Pax, pax, et non est pax.*" "Peace, peace, and there is no peace."

And, as was frequently the case, the marginal note was the only bit of truth in the document.

LOG CABIN MEN

A Five-Part Story—Part II

by HUGH PENDEXTER



Author of "Pards," "The Homesteaders," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

ALTHOUGH the treaty of Utrecht brought comparative peace in the Old World, reflecting thereby on conditions in America, there still remained the question of the boundary line between Canada and the English colonies.

So, twenty years later, in 1744, when the French king declared war on George of England, this adamant period in the New World was likewise brought to a close.

The French in Canada held an uncanny power over the Indians, and were able to employ them, despite their long friendship with the colonies, against the English settlers south of the St. Lawrence River. Governor Shirley of Massachusetts was the outstanding figure of the day in his endeavor to lead the colonists against Quebec.

The settlers of North Yarmouth in the district of Maine were among the first to feel the treachery of the erstwhile friendly redskins.

Living in log cabins, seeking out a meager living of corn from their stumpy clearings, the settlers were on the verge of starvation. They dared not go into the forests to hunt or on to the rivers to fish for fear of Indian ambushes.

The white settlers had lived so long without being seriously molested that the generation old enough to fight had lost the knack of guerilla warfare. Almost daily around North Yarmouth a colonist was tricked and tomahawked while at work within calling distance of his cabin, or else was taken prisoner and sent to Canada.

Joshua Dresser, a veteran of Anne's and William's wars in England, and Philip Burnham, a scout on Governor Shirley's business, were the first to meet in the Yarmouth settlement that agreed that the old mode of fighting would have to be revived—that the Indians would have to be met with their own game.

They talked long hours of old wars and old times, and Dresser expressed a desire to return to Massachusetts with Burnham to join Shirley's expedition against the French in Quebec.

Burnham replied—

"I'd suspect you must have been a mighty good fighting man in your day."

Dresser was indignant.

"In my day?" he cried. "I'm in my day now. I can l'arn you something about woods fighting."

This led to a small scouting expedition near the settlement, Dresser carrying a scythe.

"What are you going to do with the scythe, grandad?" Burnham asked laughingly.

"Cut the redskins' heads off," he replied.

And he did—killing several Indians on the trip, while Burnham killed none.

"Guess you'll do," remarked Burnham without a smile as he took leave of the settlement.

The two men set out for Massachusetts. Before they reached the next settlement they saved from an Indian attack Naturn Jessraday and a woman, who had been for corn at the nearest mill.

Jessraday, admiring the method of fighting of the rescuers, asked to join them.

As they walked along Jessraday amused them by telling of a dream he had twice a year—a dream of an Indian on horseback with coins in his eyes, who was always attempting to kill him. In each dream, he claimed, the Indian came nearer to him. When he should dream that the coins fell from the redskin's eyes, then he said he knew he should be killed.

During the day they put another band of Indians to rout, killing several of them. That night as they attempted to gain shelter in an old settler's cabin, they were attacked by another band of redskins. After a stiff fight they gained the cabin, but instead of finding old Ezra Pringle, they found an Indian dressed in the old man's clothes. Pringle was found tomahawked in his bed, but no trace was found of his niece who lived with him.

Just as they thought the redskins had run away in defeat a piece of bark fell on Burnham's hand. He whispered—

"One's on the roof."

"Log Cabin Men," copyright, 1925, by Hugh Pendexter.

CHAPTER FOUR

THREE BECOME FIVE.

THE three listened but heard no sound from overhead. In pantomime Burnham insisted a man was there. Jessraday enlarged the peep-hole and Burnham methodically removed the Sokoki's scalp. Jessraday reported his side of the clearing contained no foes. Dresser said the same from the window. Burnham dragged the Sokoki to the door and motioned for Dresser to unbar and open it. It required but a few seconds to pitch the dead warrior out and replace the bar. As this riddance was accomplished the three tilted their heads to catch a tell-tale sound from the roof, but heard nothing.

Dresser shook his head to indicate his disbelief. Burnham nodded his head violently. Jessraday murmured:

"I helped Pringle sod the saplings last spring when I fetched the girl up here. Man move careful and he wouldn't make any more noise than a mouse."

"Bark fell on my hand."

"Then no Injun caused it," declared Dresser. "He'd have to work through the sods and dirt first."

As he spoke he stared up at the low ceiling then spat, and hoarsely whispered:

"Piece of dirt! Plumb in my mouth!"

In a loud voice Burnham gave orders for the two to watch the clearing. Then the three of them concentrated their attention on the small saplings, laced tightly together with rawhide, the covering of earth showing between the crevices. Burnham took the position occupied by Dresser when the dirt fell into his face and detected a slight motion. It was almost imperceptible, yet several crumbs of dirt fell into his face.

He pointed out the spot, and the three waited. An inch of a knife-blade showed for a moment. Jessraday raised his musket, but Burnham restrained him. The knife point appeared and disappeared, and it was obvious the savage on the roof was seeking the rawhide thongs which held the saplings together. As they watched, one thong was severed and the blade was silently withdrawn. The Indian shifted his position, and this time the three of them heard the slight noise.

The white men talked, but with their eyes turned upward. Bits of dirt fell on Jessraday's neck as he bent forward to look through the peep-hole. Again the knife-blade appeared, hunting for the rawhide lacing. The Indian had traced down the sapling from the roof nearly to the eaves and his purpose was now plain. He was endeavoring to cut enough of the rawhide so as to wrench the saplings loose with one effort and thereby make a large opening. He had selected the west side of the cabin and had been on the roof and out of sight of the white men when they entered the clearing, but in plain view of his companions, hiding in the woods. Once the section of the roof was demolished the hidden savages would attack in force.

Burnham extended his musket and prodded Dresser, who was at the window. The old man turned and crossed the room. Burnham pointed to the scythe and then noiselessly placed a block of wood just behind Jessraday. Dresser, armed with his terrible weapon, followed the direction of Burnham's pointing finger and saw the knife-blade gently sawing back and forth. The old man needed no other directions. Pushing Burnham aside he stepped on the block and grinned grimly as he studied the sawing blade.

The two men stepped back and held their muskets ready to shoot through the roof if need be. Dresser, still smiling, gently inserted the point of the scythe between two saplings and just back of the moving blade. He whispered for Burnham to steady him. The borderer stepped behind him and clamped his hands against the small of Dresser's back and braced his legs. With a mighty heave Dresser threw himself back and thrust the scythe upward and yanked it toward him and grunted explosively from the effort.

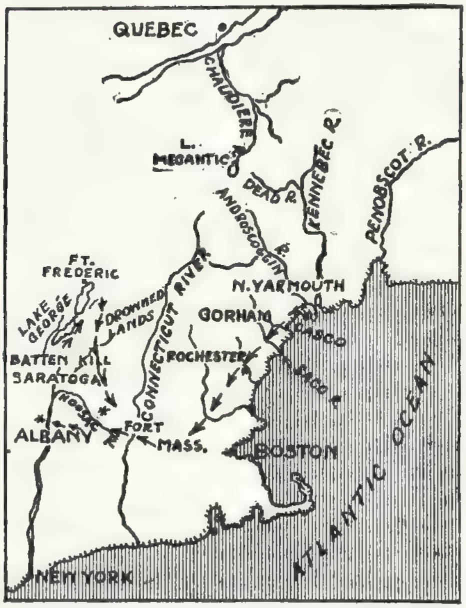
A terrible scream greeted the maneuver. The cry was echoed by amazed yells from the woods. Jessraday dropped on his knees and put his eye to the peep-hole.

"Oh, lord! What a fearsome sight!" he cried.

Burnham pushed him aside and took his place. Although used to barbarous sights he winced as he stared down on the victim of the long blade. He turned away and allowed Dresser to peer out. The old man stared for a moment at the disembowled figure, then proudly remarked:

"Gimme a scythe every time for stubborn work. A Nova Scotia Abnaki, painted red from scalp to toes. He's got a new kind of red paint now."

The howling in the western woods ceased abruptly. Burnham at the peep-hole discerned a movement along the edge of the growth, but saw no individuals among the hidden enemy. Over his shoulder he warned—



"They're getting ready to attack."

"We might have time to make the woods to the east if we run for it now," suggested Jessraday.

"No. There's nothing but death for us if we run," growled Dresser. "We'll meet 'em here and have it over with. We have four guns and my scythe."

"I was thinking of you two. Nothing will hurt me till my dream changes," said Jessraday. "I can begin yelling and shooting two muskets and give you two a chance to steal away."

"That's a brave offer," gravely replied Dresser. "And it would have worked when we first blundered into this trap."

Burnham interrupted them by sharply directing:

"Dresser, dig another loop-hole on this side. Jessraday, keep watch by the window."

And he fell to work himself to make a third loop-hole so three guns could be discharged simultaneously when the enemy entered the opening.

Dresser worked rapidly, finishing as Burnham belted his knife and peered through the small opening. The two were in time to behold what at first appeared to be a gigantic bat. It scaled into the air to the height of a dozen feet and clumsily fluttered to the ground in the opening. During the brief interval the gaze of the besieged was concentrated on this unexpected intrusion. A dozen savages, widely scattered, darted into the clearing and took cover behind stumps and charred logs.

"Fooled us the first thing!" exclaimed Burnham in disgust.

"By stretching a blanket on light poles and scaling it into the air," wrathfully added Dresser. "No matter what happens, watch the ground."

Jessraday, ignorant of what had happened, earnestly offered:

"Let me charge them with one gun. I know they must be all on that side. At the worst I'll be took prisoner and carried to Canada. I feel to blame for you're getting into this mess."

"Shut up and stick to the window. When we give the word, join us with your gun. Very soon—"

Burnham didn't finish. Twelve muskets were discharged in a rippling volley. Under cover of this, three more Indians entered the clearing. These emptied their guns, the heavy balls plunking into the logs and knocking loose the chinking of dried mud.

Burnham jerked back his head and brushed some dirt from his face and complained:

"Bad fix. Wish Pringle had cleared out the logs and stumps. They can crawl mighty close once it gets dark."

"I only ask they come to grips and give me a mite of clearance for swinging my scythe," mumbled Dresser.

And his pale blue eyes blazed with the lust for battle at close quarters. Jessraday dropped by a loop-hole and soon was crying:

"Soul's love! They ain't going to wait for darkness!"

This as, one after another, the savages at each end of the line showed themselves briefly in advancing to new cover. While the attention of the besieged was held by this maneuver on the extreme right and left, those in the center gained ground. The continuous popping up and disappearing of their naked, painted forms afforded no opportunity for marksmanship, and the whole line gained a score of feet without a gun being fired from the cabin.

"You'll have your wish about close quarters, old man," gritted Burnham. "If I knew just where a man was going to show himself I might hit him."

"On the right end of the line!" yelled Jessraday. A savage had shown himself for a second. Another, within a few feet of the first, did likewise. Then the first repeated.

"Hold your fire," commanded Burnham. "They want us to shoot."

"Hi! They've gained more ground!" hoarsely cried Dresser.

The maneuver on the north end of the line had permitted several men on the south end to hurl themselves forward for a few feet. Dresser then examined the ground critically and decided—

"The bulk of 'em can git within fifty feet of us and we can't harm a single one except by luck."

"Don't fire even if I do," said Burnham.

"On the left!" grunted Dresser, as several blankets were tossed into the air, and as three guns were discharged and there came momentary glimpses of naked forms that rose and fell.

BUT this time Burnham turned his back to his companions and gave no heed to the gesticulating figures which were no sooner seen than they disappeared. His gaze was focused on the north end of the line where there was no demonstration. As the howling and shooting and blanket waving increased on the left, Burnham sighted along the musket and waited for the old trick to be repeated. The screeching approached an ear splitting climax when he glimpsed a savage rapidly crawling to more advanced cover. Dresser and Jessraday were watching the other end of the line. They exclaimed sharply as Burnham's gun exploded.

Burnham shouted derisively and told them:

"Didn't work that time! On the right end! One of you watch. They'll try to drag him back."

And he proceeded to reload while Dresser stared approvingly at the motionless figure stretched out with a ball through the head and within a few feet of a log. Dresser hoped for a savage to show himself, but only saw a loop of rawhide drop on the dead man. The cast was repeated several times and then caught around an arm and the dead man was drawn back to cover.

"By——" rejoiced Dresser. "Cost them two men already. They don't like to trade at that price."

"They'll be more careful," muttered Burnham. "But their leader now must take our hair, or his band will follow another man on the next path."

A smoky streak began behind a log and burst into flame as it sailed in a short arc and ended its flight close to the logs, an upright, blazing torch. It was the first fire-arrow, and soon burned itself out. It was nicely calculated, considering that the savage discharged it while flat on his back behind a log. In quick succession three more, laden with tow and pitch, rose from as many points of cover.

Jessraday left his loop-hole and fumbled about the cabin for a minute, and then lamented—

"Why, there ain't a drop of water in the place, and this hut will burn like tinder!"

His companions were concerned over the last flight. Two cleared the cabin. The third struck a glancing blow close under the eaves of the west side and fell to the ground directly under Burnham's loophole.

Dresser cheered the failure, but each of them knew it was but a question of minutes before an arrow found its mark. There was a pause of several minutes without a sound from the clearing. Then a turkey-bone whistle sounded a signal. Instantly a dozen guns crashed a volley, the bullets being aimed at the loopholes. None entered the cabin, but the fire was so searching that the defenders for a few moments crouched low. Jessraday lifted his head in time to see an Indian on the edge of the forest drop from sight. A moment later the besieged heard a soft *plump* on the roof. Fierce yells of triumph came from the logs and stumps.

Glooskap, worshipped by the western Algonquian tribes under the name of Nanabozho, had heard his children. He created the little people who live in rocks and he created the first eastern Abnaki man from an ash tree. He is always making arrows. One side of his huge lodge is filled with arrows. For ages he had been preparing for the final war. From Newfoundland and

Nova Scotia to the heads of the Missouri and the Saskatchewan his children know of this preparation. Now their medicine-men had told them the final war had come. Glooskap was tired of beholding English smokes. The race was to be exterminated. It was peculiarly fitting that the three white men penned in the cabin should be captured by means of an arrow.

The shaft of the fire-arrow was crackling briskly. The besiegers felt the presence of their god, now they had returned to the bow and arrow. Burnham stood on the block of wood to tear an opening in the roof, but Dresser restrained him, saying:

"Wait. It may burn out. There isn't much dry grass and it can't burn the dirt. Unless it sets the saplings afire it'll do no damage."

Burnham refrained from disturbing the saplings. There was the smell of smoke from the arrows landing close to cabin, but the torch on the roof did no damage. The Indians were not running any further risks. The fire-arrows continued and a bowman at the edge of the forest deliberately fired at the roof. His third arrow happened to lodge in the crevice made by Dresser's scythe. Jessraday was the first to discover the wisp of smoke inside the small room. He yelled to his companions and, by the time they had turned, the entire length of the crevice was crackling briskly. Like magic the flames secured a hold on the saplings and wound them with fire. As the smoke found its way through the aperture and rose from the roof, pursued by red flames, the hidden foe howled in delirious joy. Inside the cabin the smoke began to belly down.

"It's spreading to all the saplings!" yelled Jessraday, wiping the sweat from his face. "Good lord! Must you two die without having a chance to shoot a gun!"

The yelling of the besiegers reached a terrible crescendo as they realized the entire roof must shortly cave in. The turkey-bone whistle cut sharply through the clamor, and Indian after Indian rushed to more advanced cover while the whites coughed and bent low to escape the thickening smoke.

"Shoot when they charge again!" cried Burnham. "Then it's outside with knife and ax. We must make them kill us fighting."

The whistle shrilly sounded, and Burnham fired at the first Indian to pop into view and, more by luck than marksmanship, shot him through the neck and sent him to report to Glooskap. But the whole line was now up and madly charging, and Dresser had thrown open the door for the final dash. But at this juncture a new note intruded on the unequal battle, a note so weird and stirring that even in their lust for slaughter the savages heard it and wondered. It became a mad, screeching, screaming note of triumph, and the red line wavered. And there was an awful menace for either white or red in its expanding volume.

"What is it?" huskily cried Burnham as he stood in the open doorway, ready to leap from the heat and the smoke.

The piercing voice, awakening the forest to a great distance, suddenly changed to a ponderous, martial measure that spoke of war and the booming of many guns. The mad music grew louder. The walled-in opening pulsated with its weird exultation. Even Dresser's slow blood grew hot under the stimulus, and he jumped from the blazing cabin and threw back his head, and his scrawny throat emitted fierce yells of defiance. Burnham felt himself swirled upward in a consuming vortex of passion. He heard himself shouting the explosive war-cry of his Mohawk friends, and insane to grapple with the enemy. Jessraday, from his corner of the cabin, shouted:

"They're making back to the woods. But I can't see who's making that queer music."

Its course could be traced, however, as it streamed along inside the timber and threatening to intercept the Indians' line of retreat. Now the soul stirring pibroch majestically swept on to a climax, and Jessraday began shrieking incoherently, and racing madly after the savages. The roof of the cabin was a bed of coals on the earthen floor of the cabin, and the log walls were so many sheets of flame. Burnham and Dresser charged from the other end of the ruins. The Indians were running for cover, leaping from side to side, but none the less in a panic. They veered their flight to the north to avoid encountering the strange war-god now advancing along the western edge of the clearing.

Shouting like madmen—and they were madmen for the time—the three whites leaped logs in pursuit of the panic stricken Indians. Dresser shot a man. Burnham wounded one with the gun taken from the Sokoki, killed at the corn mortar. Jessraday saved his fire. Dresser, now armed only with his scythe, whooped and swung the long blade and bounded forward with the agility of youth. And above it all continued that madness just inside the timber.

Still drunk with lust for mortal combat, Burnham flung himself inside the growth and repeatedly shouted his Mohawk war-cry and plunged about to find an enemy. Dresser screamed like a loon and cursed and prayed confusedly. But the Abnaki had vanished to the northward. A scalping knife in its beaded sheath, a bow and a half filled quiver, a paint bag, a French ax, and the body of the Indian Burnham had shot in the clearing were all that remained to testify to the visit of the war party. The dead man still had the rawhide cord around his arm.

IT WAS incredible. It was miraculous. Jessraday was first to regain his self-control. His companions stormed and stamped and ran about, until the approaching music changed to a wailing and a sobbing that made the heart ache.

"It's bagpipes!" cried Jessraday. "Bagpipes, by the Eternal!"

And through a leafy screen emerged the piper, her face grimed with dirt and tears, her black eyes mirroring horror. She walked mechanically, as if not seeing the three men. Her small cheeks were rounded like apples as she continued the sad strain. She was a small maid and in calmer moments the men were to wonder how she could carry the bag under her left arm and how she could manage to inflate it.

Burnham grew weak to the point of faintness. He leaned against a tree and stared dully at the slight figure. Dresser broke off in a wild howl and forgot to close his mouth. Yet he was the first to speak, although all he could say was—

"Good lord!"

The girl ceased playing and sank down at the foot of a tree.

"You're Ezra Pringle's niece!" exclaimed Jessraday.

"Pringle's niece!" repeated Burnham stupidly.

The crackling of the flames in the clearing returned his wits; and he exclaimed—

"Why, little girl, they've burned your house!"

She stared at him as if not understanding, then whispered:

"He's dead. I saw him killed. I was at the edge of the woods with my pipes. Big Moose, his friend, killed him. Oh, so terrible!" And she slumped forward, a pathetic little heap, and her sobbing shook her slight form convulsively.

Keenly alert now to the danger of the savages returning, Burnham directed his companions to scalp the two dead men and gather up the discarded guns and powder horns and follow him. Then he scooped the girl and the pipes into his arms and, with his old forest cunning, made for the south.

The girl wept silently for a bit, then insisted on being allowed to walk. Her mind was on the tragedy, and she commenced:

"It is so wicked for my poor uncle to be murdered by a man he had fed and warmed so many times. It happened I was in the woods when the Moose came. I had my pipes, but had no heart to play them. I've been very lonely up here. Our clearing is so raw I couldn't bear to stay in it. I started to go back and was at the edge of the woods when I saw that awful evil. God help me to forget it! Nothing but misery and sorrow since my mother died."

"Let's hope the bad part is all finished," soothed Burnham. "I wonder how such a little thing can play the pipes."

"I learned from my father. In the blood, probably. He said I had the music. I don't remember trying to learn. I just played what I heard him play."

"Jessraday told me you're Ezra Pringle's niece. I don't remember that he mentioned your name."

"Hoped-For Robson. My mother wanted me. They call me Hope."

"It's a sweet and honest name. If you hadn't been a very brave little woman I and my friends would have been killed."

"I was afraid so," she murmured. "I was hiding when you ran to the cabin. I wanted to cry out to warn you about the Moose. It was too late. And I knew savages were in the woods on the west. Then they came and you had to fight for it. When the roof caught fire I knew I would rather die than see you men captured. Before I knew it I was playing the pipes and walking through the woods. My mother told me Indians who had heard the pipes would follow a piper a long way, greedy for more. And that those hearing them for the first time would be frightened. Some one comes."

"It's Dresser. There's Jessraday off to the right."

He whistled softly and the two soon came up.

Jessraday awkwardly announced:

"Miss Hope, the burned cabin is your uncle's grave. You're bound to think about it some time, so I'm telling you."

"He was a good man," she softly said. "He believed all other men were good."

"And I was worried about you with the Injuns acting up so, and I come here to take you back to Falmouth or Scarborough.'

"Lonely as it is I wouldn't have left my uncle. Now he's gone, I'll go. But not to Falmouth or Scarborough."

Burnham sensed a delay in his plan to journey at once to the Hudson. He inquired why she couldn't go to one of the Maine settlements.

"I can't. They didn't like my playing the pipes. They were all the company I had. When I play them it seems I am talking with my father."

The men exchanged puzzled glances. Burnham frowned in his perplexity, and then said—

"Sometimes a little girl doesn't know what's best for her."

She flashed him a quick glance, then replied:

"I've done as others wanted. My uncle wanted me. He's gone. There are people in Albany who knew my father. I've been lonely long enough. I'll go to Albany."

She spoke quietly but there was finality in her voice. Burnham thought for a moment, then said:

"Why, see here, child. How is this for a plan? I have a sister living on the Hoosac at Fort Massachusetts. You shall go with Dresser and me as far as that. My sister will be glad to have you stay with her as long as you will. You can get in touch with your Albany friends and go to them if you wish."

The girl's face lighted.

"If it wouldn't trouble you too much it would be what I'd like." Then regretfully, "It's too bad Mr. Jessraday put himself to so much bother and ran into so much danger for nothing."

"Just wait a minute," glumly said Jessraday. Then to Burnham, "I come here to fetch Miss Hope to the coast. My errand ain't finished till I see her safely housed. If she goes to your sister's home I'll go along that far."

"Then that's settled," declared Dresser. "And we'll give the scalp money we've earned this day to her."

She clapped her hands to her ears and pleaded—

"Oh, don't, don't!"

"No, no. Nothing of the sort," soothed Burnham.

And he turned and gave the old man a malevolent glance.

Dresser coughed apologetically and sought to change the subject by examining his beard and ruefully regretting:

"A good third of it scorched off. No days like the old days. I remember at the beginning of William's war—"

But Burnham was quick to suspect some bloody reminiscence, and stilled him with a dig in the ribs.

Jessraday reminded them of possible danger by saying:

"Why are we waiting here? Quicker we travel southwest and make the New Hampshire settlements, the quicker we'll deliver Miss Hope at Fort Massachusetts. Here's your gun, Burnham. Picked it up where you dropped it when you began toting Miss Hope. But these other guns can't be lugged to New Hampshire."

"Smash the guns and save only the powder. Better heave that scythe away, Dresser."

"After seeing the goodly work—"

Jessraday stepped heavily on his foot.

"The scythe goes where I go," angrily declared Dresser.

They started, the girl walking with Jessraday, while Burnham brought up the rear and Dresser scouted ahead. It was too late in the day to go far, and they made their first camp within a few miles of the Pringle clearing.

NOTHING was seen or heard of Indians until the four travelers came to the outskirts of Rochester. Dresser had assured the girl that this settlement was immune from attack as it was within twenty miles of Portsmouth. Yet when they sighted the first houses Burnham cried:

"Something bad has happened."

Men were running back and forth. Several wagons were moving down the Portsmouth road. One driver was frantically whipping his horses. For aught they could observe the countryside was as serene as the blue sky. What looked to be aimless confusion among the few settlers in sight prompted the girl to remember a similar scurrying back and forth of the tiny life disclosed when a flat rock is moved from its damp resting place. She adjusted the position of the bagpipes and made ready to launch a challenge on the drowsy June air. She looked a child beside Burnham's towering bulk, and imitative, like a child, she unconsciously copied his bearing and the expression of his bony face. She held her head high and thrust out her small chin and frowned. He happened to glance down at her uptilted face and he would have been considerably amused if not for the symptoms of tragedy shown in the flight down the Portsmouth road.

Dresser, with his musket slung over his shoulder, spat on his hands and began swinging the scythe before him, mowing down imaginary grass or Indians.

Burnham was puzzled. There was no gun-fire nor smoke. The settlers called back and forth to each other, but there was no red war-cry. He decided—

"Whatever it is, it's all over."

"Their scare ain't ended yet," muttered Jessraday.

And he pointed to a woman leading two children across a field the four had just entered. The woman was hurrying as fast as the children could run, and frequently she cast frightened glances towardthe north.

Burnham called to her but she continued to the Portsmouth road as fast as the children's short legs would permit. The travelers had better luck with the next fugitive. He was an old man and blind, and feeling his way with a long staff. At first they thought he was hunting for something. Exploring with his staff he moved along in a zig-zag line. When Dresser called to him he lifted the staff and began swinging it around his head, and kept crying:

"Keep back! Keep back! I'll slaughter all of ye!"

It was the Robson girl who made him understand he was in no danger. For after she had assured him, "We're white folks. We're friends," he leaned on his staff, panting from his violent efforts and conceded:

"That's a white woman talking. Who be ye? Where'd ye come from? Burned out by the red papists?"

Dresser briefly gave their identity and purpose, and then inquired the cause of the excitement. The old man turned his head until his eyes seemed to stare at Jessraday. The latter puzzled the girl by muttering:

"——! Maybe that's how the dead eyes will see me. Not in a dream. Man mayn't be on a hoss."

The old man cleared his throat and, in an expressionless voice, explained:

"The red papists tore off the roof of a house and tomahawked four of our young men and took a man and a boy prisoners. That was yesterday. Ever since we folks have been looking for them to come back and do more harm. I don't see why Governor Wentworth don't protect us. The poor dead men are Joseph Heard, John Wentworth, Gershom Downs and Joseph Richards. And they're cold in death along of their foolish haste. I give it to you as was told to me by a woman who saw all the cruel work.

"They was working in the field north of this, and each man had his gun. The Injuns was hid on the edge of the field. One of them showed hisself and fired his papist musket to git the men to empty their guns. The poor simples all fired at the one Injun. Then the whole band was rushing upon them. They ran into a cabin and barred the door and tried to reload. But the —— was smarter'n wildercats. The young widder Pease, who's run away to Portsmouth town with her two children, saw it all. And she says she saw old Sathan hisself tossing 'em up on the roof. She says only Black Help could cover that cabin roof with Injuns before a man can wink an eye. She says it was only a second from the time they reached that cabin, tore off the roof and were finishing the horrible work inside. She saw them come to the door with one prisoner."

"If they'd held their fire in the field and fell back slowly, not one would have been harmed," snarled Dresser, his singed beard bristling. "——! I'd liked to come a-visiting that cabin when they come through the door! I'd made the old scythe hum!"

"A child should have known better,"

mumbled Jessraday, then shifting his position so the dull eyes would not find him.

"Are they all quitting the settlement?" asked Burnham.

"I can't see how many went. They tell me only a few. The rest will be on their guard and won't be fooled again. But I'm only a bother, so I'll feel my way to Portsmouth if one of you will point me to the road."

The girl took his arm and led him to the road and faced him to the south and ran back to her companions. On entering the settlement they found much sadness but no terror. They were welcomed by Moses Roberts*, spokesman for the citizens.

The settlement was eager for news from the east. In turn they repeated the blind man's story. It was so much evidence of the lack of border craft in the generation maturing during the twenty years of peace. No veteran of William's or Anne's war would have been betrayed into the folly of emptying his gun at a savage, deliberately inviting a bullet. It also evidenced the false sense of security a settlement could feel because of being neighbor to a strong town.

The savages had appeared on the New Hampshire frontier in May of the preceding year. They had cruelly harassed the settlements on the Connecticut and the Merrimac. They had killed at Great Meadows, sixteen miles above Fort Dummer†. In the same month they had found victims at Upper Ashuelot‡, and during that summer killed or captured sixteen at Number Four°. If this grim record of red victories were not sufficient to put all outlying communities on guard, the massacres were renewed with terrible ferocity in April of 1746.

Now there was no quiet anywhere. Canada, fearing the promised invasion and believing she was fighting with her back to the wall, hurled band after band against the border settlements. The French believed the northern empire was lost unless the New England offensive could be checked by red depredations at home. Number Four was again attacked. Men and women were killed at Upper Ashuelot. Scalps were taken at Bridgeman's fort near Fort Dummer. Pennacook** paid toll to the extent of five killed and two captured. These last were caught in the Indians' favorite trap, an ambush for those returning home from church. The number of those who went into the woods and never returned will never be known.

THE travelers were urged to remain and were offered a stout cabin, while the Robson girl was invited by every matron to a permanent home. But Burnham looked beyond the exigence of the moment and insisted:

"The only way to stop this bloody business is to strike the French at home. We can clear our frontiers of the Indians by carrying the war to Montreal, Quebec and Three Rivers. We three men are bound for Albany to join the Canada expedition. If you folks will fall back to Portsmouth for a few months and send your men with Shirley's arm of the expedition, it will be many years, if ever, before the frontier suffers again. In staying here you are doing what the French want you to do. Sail from Boston for the St. Lawrence or march through the Champlain and Richelieu country, and Canada will lose all her murderers. The Indians will never fight to help a loser."

Roberts agreed it was a likely theory, but insisted a moral lesson was to be taught. Even if Canada were taken the two Crowns would ultimately patch up their differences and restore mutual gains, and then would come another war.

"But if we're stubborn and hold," he continued, "as we've held out this far from Northfield on the Connecticut and Fort Massachusetts on the Hoosac way across to the Kennebec, the papist devils will understand they can't kill us or drive us off, and that trying to do so is mighty costly business for them. The little girl will want to stay here, I take it."

Hoped-For shook her head. Dresser explained:

"She has friends in Albany. She chooses to go along with us. We'll stay the night and be off early in the morning. We have scalps and wish to trade for four horses."

"Scalps!" exclaimed Roberts, his eyes glittering. "Then let us see them! It will be a heartening sight."

This eagerness was shared by all, old and young, women and men, and those who had not joined the group were brought on the run by the magic words—

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*Roberts was killed at Rochester, August 6, by another sentinel who mistook him for an Indian.

†Hinsdale. ‡Keene. °Charlestown. **Concord.

"Injun scalps!"

Practically all the townspeople were crowding around the newcomers when the scalps were produced. Men cheered themselves hoarse. Women shouted shrilly and little children added their piercing falsettos. And the settlers were amazed that three men could live through so much fighting and could kill so many of the elusive enemy.

Before sundown Burnham and Jessraday scouted the scene of the massacre and searched for signs in the adjacent woods. They struck the trail the Indians took in departing with their two prisoners. They followed it to the westward for several miles and found where the savages had stopped and roasted some beef. On a flat stone by the ashes they observed two names printed with a charred stick—

Richards—Door

Satisfied the band was hurrying back to Canada, either by following up the Connecticut and Lake Memphremagog, or by way of some western tributaries of the Connecticut to Black river and Lake Champlain, the scouts returned and told of their discoveries. The townspeople informed them that Jonathan Door, a boy, and John Richards were the two who had left their names. And they were greatly relieved to believe that the two would be taken to Canada.

There was one phase of warfare on this border which had not been so apparent on the Maine frontier. This was the systematic effort to destroy crops and stock. Fences were broken down and fruit trees were spoiled. There was a malice in the raiders hatred which was not satisfied with scalps and prisoners.

Jessraday phrased it—

"If they could, they'd plough this land and sow it with salt."

On the way back to town they gathered up and drove in five cows that had not been milked for several days. The recovery of the cattle occasioned much joy, and the borderers were again urged to remain in Rochester.

"We must go on. Afoot if we can't get horses. We plan to cross the Merrimac at Pennacook."

"There's been killings there," warned a woman.

"And here," reminded Burnham.

"If you must go, we'll see you have hosses," promised Roberts. "We'll take a scalp in pay even if we have to wait a bit for the bounty. We'll throw in food, powder and lead if you need it."

The Robson girl went with a matron. The three men elected to remain together and took the cabin vacated by the woman and two children. This was the nearest cabin to the scene of the preceding day's massacre. Before turning in for the night they walked around the town. They found sentinels posted. As they were about to seek their rest men's harsh voices and the shrill tones of several women talking rapidly came from the west side of the settlement. The three went to investigate although they knew the confusion was not occasioned by an Indian alarm. They met a group of the men talking vociferously, and recognized Robert's voice and hailed him.

He joined them in the darkness and explained—

"Just been driving a brawling, drunken outcast from town."

"A pirate, if ever there was one," spoke up a woman. "He's been hanging 'round town ever since morning, a-witching the children with his ugly looks. Most likely running away from the law in Boston."

"He knows New York better'n he does Boston," gruffly added a man.

"Pirates never liked Boston," informed Dresser. "In the good old days they never stopped there less it was to be gibbeted. New York was always the place for those boys. Boston was too hard on gaming and fighting, and a loud sung chorus in praise of sin."

"This son of Belial was given to song. And such terrible songs," said Roberts. "They're enough to make your hair feel prickly. A thoroughly bad, abandoned, vicious old man if I ever see one."

"Sold hisself to old Satan if ever a man did," contributed another. "By his own tell he's seen and done enough evil to fill the ocean. He was showing the Whipple boy how to make his little friends walk a plank into a butt of rain-water before he'd been in town an hour. They've followed him around all day the best their mothers could do."

"Been better if we'd kept him until we learned if he's witched any of 'em," spoke up the mother of the Whipple boy.

"He's done the youngsters no harm," assured Burnham. "And a night in the woods may cool his desire for singing."

As they went to their small cabin Dresser remarked:

"Instead of driving that pirate fellow away they oughter give him a heavy ration of rum and turn him loose against the next band of Injuns that comes along. Git him cornered and he'd probably be rare —— with his whinger."

"If he had a whinger and could be driven out where the Indians could corner him," sleepily added Burnham. "You're quiet this day, Jessraday."

"It's that blind man. When he turned his eyes on me, I felt just as I will if the dead man ever shakes off them coins and looks at me," soberly explained Jessraday.

His companions endeavored to talk him out of the mood, attacking his obsession from several angles. But the dark spell was over him, and followed him to his blankets.

THIS overnight halt in the rude comforts of a cabin permitted the Robson girl to correct her dishevelled and bedraggled appearance. The men were surprized by the transformation. Dresser secretly told Burnham—

"She's almost pretty, poor child."

Burnham decided she was quite comely. Heretofore her small face had impressed him as being all eyes with her tangled, dark hair hanging low over her forehead. She was bareheaded when she came to the rescue with her pipes and had Indian moccasins on her small feet, but wore no stockings. Forest travel had torn and stained her gown of coarse stuff and Burnham, remembering the silks, striped satins and poplins of New York and Albany, the gloves, dainty shoes and other accessories of women's dress, had pitied her for being a pathetic, nondescript little figure. With the new day before him and the irrepressible exuberance of twenty-three years animating him, he almost believed that the old man was right and that if life ever were kind enough to curve her lips in a smile and erase the somber, brooding expression from the small brown face, she would in fact be almost pretty.

Moses Roberts brought four horses and took one scalp in payment. If he was overpaid he would have to wait for the four hundred pounds bounty, and all parties to the bargain were satisfied. The girl rode easily, sitting astride like a boy, and the morning or the change in environment had improved her mood, although it was too soon for her large eyes to lose their haunting sorrow. She did, however, gaze about to note the beauties of the morning, and she had a quick eager glance of sympathy for a little boy hugging a dog. Dresser noted this and mumbled to Burnham:

"Oughter git her a big dog. Something she can make of."

Burnham nodded, surprized the old man should possess that much sentiment. They said good-by to the group of townspeople and rode slowly through the dewy morning into the west. Burnham took a course that would permit them to cross the Merrimac at Pennacook. He rode in advance with Dresser at some distance on his right. Any danger from the Indians would show itself in the north, they believed. The precaution, however, was a bit of their daily routine for, beyond question, the war party had traveled west with the two prisoners.

Jessraday, somehow, accepted as the girl's guardian because of his going to rescue her from the loneliness and exposure of the Pringle clearing, kept beside her. Discovering he was downcast in spirit, she forgot her own troubles for the time in endeavoring to make him talk.

"Guess I'm poor company, little woman," he mournfully told her. "It's that blind man staring at me."

"The poor blind man!" she sighed. "He could never bring harm to any one by turning his head. Think how happy he would be if he could see."

"Guess I'm a niddy-noodle to let it bother me. But it made me remember my dream."

She had learned the whole story of the dead man riding through his dreams and believed it was a powerful potent. But she refused to interpret the sightless eyes of the blind man as meaning any evil. She became eager in her desire to dispel his troubled thoughts, and he was the better for listening. When they were some five miles from Rochester, the four of them riding together, the girl lifted her brows and tilted her head and glanced questioningly at Burnham.

"Sounds like some one trying to sing,"

he told her as he stared ahead where the horse path entered a grove of sugar maples. "It's a white man."

"Sounds more like a bullfrog," grunted Dresser.

Jessraday added—

"Sounds like some one had been drinking too much New England rum and was forgetting that the Injuns are hunting scalps."

They advanced and Dresser grumbled—

"An ungodly song, I'll vow."

They could not catch the words, but there was no suggestion of psalmody in the voice or song. When they came to the edge of the maples, Burnham raised a hand for them to halt. The singer was just ahead and concealed by the timber. That he had not discovered them was evidenced by his continuing his vocal efforts and bawling most lustily:

" 'Then each man to his gun,
For the work must be done,
With cutlass, sword, or pistol;
And when we no longer can strike a blow,
Then fire the magazine, boys, and up we go,
It is better to swim in the sea below
Than to hang in the air, and to feed the crow,'
Said jolly Ned Teach of Bristol."*

Shocked by the sentiment, Dresser urged his mount forward and into the maples ahead of his companions. They soon heard him sternly demanding:

"How dare you desecrate God's wonderful new day by singing about that bloody pirate, Blackbeard? Who are you?"

"Gently and softly," mumbled the singer.

Then the others entered the scene.

The singer would stand no taller than the Robson girl. He was seated and leaning against a maple. An empty leather bottle was beside him. His head, abnormally large, was made to look of monstrous size by the huge, bushy yellow wig. The face was withered by age and weather and across the innumerable tiny wrinkles ran several white seams, the remnants of ancient scars. Across the man's legs rested an ancient cutlass, stained and broken off several inches from the point. On observing the girl, he scrambled to his feet and with a twisted, leering grin he went through the pantomime of removing his hat and bowed low and cried:

"Fair company. But the ladies always ran to Ben Tugg."

"Looks like a gallivanting Frenchman," said Jessraday.

"Or a toad," growled Dresser.

"Gently and softly, comrades," warned the singer. "Ben Tugg has seen much blood flow for less than that."

"Enough of this nonsense, Tugg, or whatever you call yourself," warned Burnham. "You're the wastrel who was driven from Rochester last night."

"I was in Rochester town yesterday. I spent the night here."

"Drunk!" exclaimed Dresser in disgust.

"Not so. Ill luck still dogs me. I was but half drunk. Drunk enough to see Ned Teach and William Fly. Not drunk enough to keep them with me for company. Fly had his neck twisted. Just as it was after he was gibbeted on Nix's Mate, and as other old comrades were twisted on Bird Island. Fly had courage but no head. I said that in the spring of '26 when he was bosun of the snow *Elizabeth*, Guinea bound from Jamaica. He drowned the cap'n and the mate and named the snow *Fame's Revenge*. Something of the poet in Fly. But he was stupid in letting himself be captured by the sailors he'd pressed."

He slumped to a sitting posture as if weary, and concluded:

"Only half drunk. When I'm prime jolly, Ned stays with me for hours. I was having an old song for my breakfast when you gentles came along."

"You're hungry!" exclaimed the girl.

"Fair lady, I'm starving," replied Tugg with a grimace that puckered his wizened face until it looked like a shrunken, winter-kept apple.

"—— spawn! Find honest work and earn your victuals!" heatedly advised Jessraday.

The stare from the pale yellowish eyes was as venomous as ever the dead rider would bestow.

"Ride on," said Burnham.

"Nay, nay," sharply said the girl. "A starving man can't work. He must eat first." And she slid to the ground and untied a package fastened with the bagpipes to the blanket strap behind her and produced a large piece of journeycake and chunk of meat and gravely placed it on Tugg's knee.

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*Supposed to have been written by Benjamin Franklin. He says, in naming his apprentice ballads, "The other was a sailor's song on the taking of Teach, or Blackbeard, the pirate. They were wretched stuff." Memorial Hist. Boston. Vol. 2, p. 17.

THE pale yellow eyes stared at the food for a moment, then the thin hands were seizing it and Tugg was bolting it wolfishly. After he had picked the last crumbs from his ragged sleeves he hoarsely mumbled—

"In God's truth, but it's the first food I've had in two days!"

"But you had money for rum," said Dresser, strongly disapproving of the girl's bounty.

"And the rum made me sing and my song fetched me my breakfast," replied Tugg, leering wickedly at the old man. "Now I'm fed I'll try again to reach the fighting."

"What fighting?" curiously asked Burnham.

"Against the French," snarled Tugg. "I've sunk 'em afloat and I'll board 'em on dry land. I owe much to the French." And he tore off his big wig and grinned venomously as he slowly turned his head so all might see how both ears were missing. "Louis' children did that for me," he whispered as he replaced the wig.

The Robson girl leaned weakly against her horse, sickened and frightened.

"I thought only savages—" she faintly began but did not finish.

"No doubt he got what he deserved," grunted Dresser. "We must be riding."

Tugg cocked his head and reminiscently hummed a bit of an old, wicked song under his breath. Burnham wrathfully told him—

"You had no fight for the Indians who murdered the poor people at Rochester two days ago."

"I was south of the town and very drunk when it happened or I'd reddened this old blade." And with unexpected sprightliness he hopped to his feet and slashed and thrust at an imaginary foe. "Now I'll join the army and march against Quebec." Dropping his voice to a confidential whisper he added, "Stout boys should find rare looting in Quebec."

Dresser bluntly inquired—

"If keen to make Quebec and being a sailor man, why not sail from Boston in Shirley's ships?"

"Boston doesn't agree with me," was the prompt reply. "Boston doesn't know a real fighting man when he enters the town. They gave me till sundown to leave. All I did was to get drunk and offer to lead certain merchants to where the wreck of the *Quedah Merchant* lies buried."

"Bah!" snorted Dresser. "I remember when Captain Kidd offered to lead Lord Bellomont's men there, to Hispanola. It was a poor story for you to tell our merchants. They should have stocked you."

"They did," quietly informed Tugg. "I sat in the stocks on King's street till just before sundown. A sorry answer to my offer. The *Quedah Merchant* had sixty thousand pounds treasure, and Bellomont and his New York partners didn't accept Kidd's offer and lost their four-fifths share."

"If honestly taken from the French his lordship would have taken his lawful share," interrupted Dresser. "But his lordship would have nothing to do with pirate gold."

"He ached to have something to do with," assured Tugg with a knowing grin. "So would the Boston merchants if they had heard all my story. I could have told them how Sammy Bellamy took over the *Merchant*, treasure and all, and named it the *Whidah* and added to Kidd's treasure. If the merchants had been patient they never would have stocked me or if I'd been less drunk and could have talked faster. For the *Whidah*, treasure and all, was wrecked on Cape Cod eighteen years after Kidd was hung to feed the crow."

And the eccentric creature would have renewed his ballad, setting forth the life and deeds of Jolly Ned, had not Burnham harshly interrupted him by saying:

"You expect us to believe Kidd's ship and treasure were cast ashore on the New England coast?"

"Believe it or not. But the *Whidah* was the *Quedah Merchant*. She had a fat fortune in gold and silver and another in spice and other gear. I sailed with Kidd. He told the truth to Bellomont, who gave him a safe pass to Boston from Gardner's Island, then clapped in gaol and in time sent him to England to be turned off."

"The rascal is lying," said Dresser, yet there was uncertainty in his frowning gaze. "Bellamy's ship went ashore on Wellfleet Bar. I remember it well. Bellamy had captured a snow and promised the captain his vessel back if he would pilot him into Provincetown."

"Aye, aye, my lad!" eagerly broke in Tugg. "And the cap'n of the snow got him on the bar. Some say he threw overboard a burning oil barrel. The *Whidah*, carrying twenty-four guns, went to the locker.

A hundred bodies were washed up by the tide—"

"Hundred and two," corrected Dresser, now beginning to enjoy the conversation, although still retaining his hostile air.

"I'll never quarrel with a stout lad like you over two dead men. A hundred and two for good measure. Nine of the crew gained the shore, and six of them were hung. Now, lad, don't dispute me on that. I was one of the three who got clear."

"Then the law's been cheated!"

"Gently and softly, lad."

The old man did not find it displeasing to be addressed as a youth. Still he glared at the gnome-like figure.

"I made an honest offer in Boston and was stocked. The treasure does no good in the sands of Wellfleet Bar. Much of it can't ever be recovered. Yet there's a tidy portion left. Some has been cast up on the sand."

He paused and fished from an inside pocket a small leather wallet and took from it several pieces of silver and three copper coins of the time of William and Mary. Exposing them in the palm of his brown, monkey-like hand he said:

"I've starved and burned with thirst. But I've kept these. Last night, when drunk, jolly Ned wanted me to divide. But I refused."

Dresser approached and bent low over the silver pieces, and muttered—

"We used to call 'em cob-money."

"Aye, aye! You'd made a rare one for Bellamy, my boy. But that's all behind us."

And he replaced the coins in the wallet and stuffed it in his pocket. Then he further detained them against their will, for there was a fascination in his frank confession of wickedness by saying:

"I don't like the French. They treated my ears unfairly, and before that, when I was a youngish lad, they did this."

He tore open his shirt and revealed on his chest the deeply sunken brand of the *fleur-de-lis*, and bared his yellow teeth in a horrible grimace. In a voice that was hoarse with suppressed passion he cried:

"It burns now as bad as when I felt the iron. I've got a fight left in me. I'm going to board the French at Montreal or Quebec."

"If you do that you'll be doing a slight service for the many ill services you've done your country," slowly remarked Burnham. "But before you reach Albany the savages will catch you drunk, and you'll die without lifting your broken weapon."

"The open sea is my country," harshly corrected Tugg. "I come ashore to get at the French. And the savages haven't got me yet."

The girl stared at the uncouth figure steadily for a minute. Then she was saying:

"This man will fight. Let him go along with us. I can see them now, killing my poor uncle. This man can help kill them who cruelly murder helpless old men."

"No, no!" shortly replied Burnham. "There'll be enough fighting men without taking along his like."

And he clucked to his horse.

"The company of the ungodly is not wanted, even in striking the French," harshly added Dresser. "As to the survivors of the wreck on Wellfleet Bar, I've always understood but two men got ashore alive." And he rode after Burnham.

Jessraday said nothing, but moved to follow his companions. Tugg, the citizen of the open sea, made no reply but stood fumbling at his breast where the old scar still burned. His mouth was twisted in a ghastly grin as his gaze followed those who despised and spurned his company. He had forgotten the girl's presence. She was on her horse and staring down at him intently, seeing in him only a nemesis.

"Come," she told him. "We will take turns riding until we can get another horse. I don't know what you've been. But you'll fight. And I have just seen a poor old man hideously done to death by French Indians. Come."

Tugg shifted his gaze, an expression of amazement creeping over his seamed and wrinkled face. And he picked up his broken cutlass and trotted like an obedient dog beside her.

CHAPTER FIVE

HOW ONE RED MAN DIES

TO SPARE the girl, the men begrudgingly took turns in allowing Tugg to ride, but as the way was rough, they lost no time, although one of their number was always afoot. Denied rum and realizing his company was not wanted, Tugg no longer offended by his ballads concerning jolly Ned and other atrocious villains. Unless directly addressed, he talked with no one except the Robson girl. They had hoped to procure a fifth horse at Pennacook, but were disappointed, and no other beginnings of a settlement would be found until they reached the Connecticut river at the southern New Hampshire line.

Practically all the colonies at some time or other had quarrelled over boundaries. The dispute between Massachusetts and New Hampshire had been decided by the Crown in favor of the latter province, and Massachusetts had withdrawn her small garrison from Fort Dummer on the west bank of the Connecticut and had told her northern neighbor to defend her own holdings in the future. New Hampshire had replied that Dummer was of no defensive worth to her inasmuch as it was fifty miles from any other New Hampshire settlement and was of military value solely because it covered Massachusetts' settlements on the Connecticut.

Number Four, north of Dummer, had been attacked five times that spring and summer. It was directly in the path of war parties coming from Crown Point or down the Connecticut. Dummer was of no protection to this community.

The faint trail the five travelers followed into this dangerous zone contained the possibilities of an ambush at every rod. Burnham scouted ahead with Jessraday usually bringing up the rear. As they neared the Connecticut their precaution increased. They were prepared to find the savages around Dummer if the garrison had been renewed there. When within a few miles of the river their advance was checked by a violent thunder storm, accompanied by a terrific wind. They were in the ancient forest when the first rumbling was heard. They hastened to reach an opening but were still in the woods when the wind began roaring through the roof and littering the ground with dead branches. The darkness of night enshrouded them, and Burnham called a halt. Then commenced what the border men feared more than lightning bolts, the falling of trees. Tugg suspected no danger when he heard the first crashing, booming sound.

The travelers could scarcely discern each other as they huddled at the foot of a mighty monarch. Only as a bolt ripped across the heavens, or speared some towering top near-by, did a flicker of light penetrate their halting place and for the moment reveal their faces in a pallid light.

Nor did the Robson girl, seated between two mighty roots and clasping her bagpipes, seem to sense the danger, although trees were toppling on all sides. Nature could alarm her none after what she had witnessed in the Pringles' clearing. When the subdued glare of the lightning permitted her to see her companions, she noted her friends crouching with bowed heads, as if waiting for something to happen. But Tugg was insensible to danger and passed the time in skillfully tying knots in a halter rope. The horses, too, were afraid, and stood crowded close together.

The mighty roof began to leak until there was a steady drizzle. The thunder reechoed incessantly. At last Dresser told Burnham:

"Might as well be traveling. Heft of storm has passed to the east."

With a strident, grinding protest a ragged pine, a few hundred feet on the backtrail, began to give, the ancient roots breaking in a run of staccato notes, like brisk musketry-fire. Then with a roaring death song it swept down carrying with it a heavy toll of lesser growth.

Burnham got up and announced it was all chance and that they would be as safe pushing ahead. At least there was no risk of encountering Indians while the storm raged.

They resumed the journey afoot, the horses crowding against them as if seeking protection. They were often compelled to turn aside as they came to freshly fallen trees. From the roaring clamor it seemed as if the forest was full of toppling timber. They did not breathe freely until they came to a natural opening. Here the fierce onrush of the wind and the slanted rain compelled them to bow their heads and to use much energy in keeping the horses headed into the storm. Tugg, in his ignorance, preferred the dangerous shelter of the forest and, in a strangled stream of blasphemy, cursed the weather and the French as he stumbled on, clinging to the tail of a horse with one claw of a hand and clutching his big wig in the other. The rain drops, big as bullets pelted his bald head mercilessly. The Robson girl, leading the horse, heard none of his furious oaths, and when she glanced back, thought he was making faces.

They came to more woods, but now the storm was rapidly leaving them. There were longer intervals between the crashings of weakly rooted trees. At the next opening they were cheered to behold the foaming ford of the Connecticut a short distance ahead. Across the river was the small wooden structure of Fort Dummer. There was no smoke rising from it, no sign of life. Over the western forest crown appeared a streak of golden sky. Tugg and the girl were cheered to behold this, but the border men frowned. Darkness filled the east, and the continuous muttering and rumbling was like the anger of countless mad bulls.

On beholding the fort, Tugg was for crossing the river at once and gaining shelter. But Burnham seized his shoulder and held him in the dripping cover on the edge of the woods.

"Not so fast," he told Tugg. "We'll look before we cross. The sun will set soon. At least there are no Indians on this side."

"The fort seems dead," remarked Dresser, shading his eyes from the lateral sunlight.

"Mean we must stay out here when there's a roof and a fire ahead?" wrathfully demanded Tugg.

"Meaning you'll do just as we say. We stay here till it gets dark. Then I'll scout ahead and see if the way is clear. This is a very dangerous neighborhood."

They crouched on the wet ground inside the timber and waited for darkness. Burnham laid aside his gun and, armed with ax and knife, stole away to ford the river and reconnoiter. The stars took their places and pricked yellow points through the black blanket.

"Do your cussing in some foreign lingo," hissed Jessraday in Tugg's cropped ear.

"I've used Spanish, French and Dutch, you swab," growled the old pirate.

"The moon's coming up!" softly exclaimed the girl.

The men glanced at the heavens, and Jessraday clicked his teeth and wondered what next he would dream about the dead horseman.

Dresser corrected—

"Moon don't rise up there in the north."

They stared at the spot of rosy glow showing above the forest up the river. Tugg ceased tying knots in the halter rope and croaked:

"Something's burning. I've seen the light of a ship afire below the horizon and heard a lubber say it was the moon and—"

"Close your mouth!" growled Dresser.

The rosy glow deepened into crimson and mounted higher above the forest. It required no straining of the imagination to picture mad figures dancing around the flames. Dresser's voice was very hoarse as he cried:

"Some cabin's burning! Please God, the poor people had warning and come off in time!"

"They're not across the river at Dummer," whispered Jessraday. "I wish Burnham would come back."

In another minute he had his wish. Panting slightly from his exertions Burnham ran up from the river. Before any one could question him he sharply ordered—

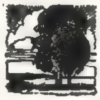
"Mount and follow me."

"Going to the fort?" asked Tugg.

"No. We'll press on. They're burning somewhere near Bridgeman's. Now's the time to get clear of them. We must sleep out tonight and travel hard tomorrow."

"But the fort—" persisted Tugg.

"Is either empty or a trap. There's no safety for us this side of the Hoosac."



FORT MASSACHUSETTS was the farthest westward of the province's three frontier defenses. To garrison these posts and scout the intervening stretches of wild forest two hundred militia originally had been put on the rolls. This military strength was stronger on paper than in fact. The fort on the Hoosac was allowed a force of fifty-one men, under command of Captain Ephraim Williams, of Newton.* Eager to participate in the expedition against Canada, he had marched away with some of the men. Sergeant John Hawks, a Deerfield man, was left in command, and in addition to having nearly half his men helpless from sickness he was confronted by a grievous shortage of ammunition.

When the five travelers from the east broke through the forest wall and beheld the fort in the midst of its stump-speckled clearing, they believed their troubles were ended. Burnham had spoken eloquently of the strength of the post, being ignorant of Williams' departure and the depletion by sickness. The several buildings were enclosed by ramparts of logs resting on a stone foundation. A blockhouse formed the northwest corner, and on the top of this was the watchtower. The tower also permitted the defenders to extinguish roof fires caused by arrows.

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*Founder of Williams College. Killed at the Battle of Lake George in 1755.

"Snug anchorage," said Tugg. "But the —— made the woods."

"I'll sleep for twenty-four hours," mumbled Dresser.

They led their wearied animals through the stumps and were discovered the moment they quit the woods. Several men ran through the gate and hastened to give them greeting.

Burnham gave their names and their business. John Hawks made himself known and told Burnham:

"Your sister, Nancy Wilks, often talks of you. Only from what she said I thought you were a little boy."

"That's like Nancy. She can't believe I've grown up. Is she here or in Albany?"

"Still here. That is, in her cabin half a mile down the river. Her husband is sick and flat on his back. She won't leave him, of course, and he doesn't want to be moved. We don't look for any danger now the French know we're going to take the fighting into Canada. But your guns will be mighty welcome just the same. Thomas Williams, our surgeon, started this morning for Deerfield for powder. We haven't enough powder to stand a siege. And we oughter have enough to blow up these stumps. I haven't more than a baker's dozen able to shoot a gun."

"I supposed you were stronger, Sergeant," soberly commented Burnham, wrinkling his brows. "Where is Captain Williams?"

"Good land! You didn't know he's marched away to go with the army into Canada?"

"You should be safe here," decided Burnham with a sweeping glance at the stout enclosure. "My friends will remain here. I must start for Albany in a day or so. I shall leave this little lady in my sister's care, but Nancy and her husband must come in at once."

"If you can persuade them—"

"I'll simply take some men to carry Wilks and carry her if necessary," interrupted Burnham. "I've important business in Albany. Something I've been trying to get at for a long time. I start very soon. It's no time for Nancy to act stubborn."

"If you're bound for Albany, mister, I'll go with you," spoke up a short stocky built man, whose hands shook as he handled his musket.

"And good riddance, Till," Hawks sharply told him. "If you were on the rolls I'd discharge you. You're worthless." To Burnham the sergeant explained, "Ruined himself drinking. Hands shake so he can't hit the fort from here."

"Kindly keep your tongue off my drinking," grumbled Till. "If I drink I learned it in the course of my duty. And precious little drink I've seen since coming here."

Ben Tugg beamed on the derelict and chose to walk beside him as the group straggled to the gate. As the two fell behind Tugg insinuated:

"You don't mean there ain't something to drink in this stout place, my lad? There's always something."

"There's a deep well on the east side the fort," bitterly replied Till. "But wait till I get to Albany!"

And he smacked his lips loudly.

"Why ain't you gone before? Can't you lay a course?"

"Bad stretch 'tween here and Albany," explained Till in a low voice. "No matter what Hawks and t'others say, there's bad business 'tween here and the Hudson. Ever since Cadenaret, big Abnaki chief, was killed near here last spring, the Injuns have been biding their time. They'll come even if they have to come without the French. But I wouldn't mind them if I could have my regular snack of liquor. I know all about them. Learned their ways when I was stationed at the Oswego trading house before the war started. But my nerves are so jumpy I can't point a gun. Give me liquor and I ain't afraid of nothing."

And he half closed his eyes and breathed heavily.

"Aye, aye," soothed Tugg. "I understand. A stout lad needs his rum, my boy. I've sailed all seas and never yet found any water that wa'n't bilge. There must be famous drinking in Albany."

"Oh, lord! The best."

They were at the gate and could observe the several log buildings inside the rampart. One of these, the largest, was on the south side of the parade ground and overlooked the wall, and was loop-holed.

Three women and five children were in

the fort. John Perry's wife ran to the Robson girl and began mothering her, and promptly led her to one of the smaller cabins. Burnham's companions hurried to the long house for food and rest, while Burnham, waiting for stretcher bearers, remained at the gate to relate the incidents of his journey. As he talked he glanced disapprovingly at the huge stumps in the clearing, and then shifted his gaze at Saddleback mountain. From the first slope of this an enemy easily could pepper the parade ground, shooting over the top of the north wall. He pointed the stumps and remarked:

"These can be blown or grubbed up. But there'll never be enough powder to remove that mountain."

"They won't come," insisted Hawks. "They're scared to death, expecting our armies any day to sail up the St. Lawrence and to sail down Champlain and the Richelieu. Don't much matter where you build a fort out here. You're sure to be hemmed in by hills."

Burnham was worried, although he was inclined to believe the French would keep their savages close at home once the expedition started.

"This is no place for my sister," he said. "I wish she and the other women and children were in Albany."

"They won't come in force enough to do us any harm," persisted Hawks. "That is if we can get enough powder and some more lead. This place is stout. They can't burn us out. Wilks is too sick to be carried to Albany. The journey would kill him."

THREE of the garrison now came to the gate carrying two trimmed saplings and a quantity of rope. Hawks gave their names, and they set out with Burnham down the valley to the Wilks cabin. The country was very mountainous, and Burnham felt shut-in when he looked at the Hoosac range in the east and the broken country in the southwest and the heights bordering the road on the north. The traveling was excellent as the road was good. There was a road, also on the opposite side of the stream.

"If Wilks can't stand the travel to Albany we might take him to some farm on the road to the Hudson. As he gets stronger he could be shifted again. And so on until we had him in Albany. The fort is no place for a sick man. He'd be a nuisance. You have enough sick people there now."

"The Dutch farmers have fallen back to the Hudson," said Jonathan Bridgeman. If the Injuns do come they'll burn the houses on the way down here. But the prime reason against your plan, Burnham, is the fact that Wilks won't take shelter in any of those houses. You see, Burnham, we ain't over fond of those people, and they ain't fond of us. Albany seems set on tying Governor Clinton's hands instead of winning this war."

As they came up to the cabin the door flew open and a tall, strongly built woman with the facial characteristics of her brother came out to meet the four men. She had her skirts tucked up and carried an ax in her hand. Her hair was black and curiously streaked with gray bands. Her gray eyes were as resolute as any man's.

"Mortal love!" she joyously cried, dropping her ax. "Well, I should say it's high time you looked your old sister up, you young scamp!"

She embraced him and kissed him loudly. Then to the men:

"You've come to take my husband back with you. But let me tell you, I'm thinking he'll stay right here."

"Wilks goes to the fort, Nancy," said Burnham.

"You impudent young brat!" she fondly cried. "Why, I've basted you good and proper times beyond count. And you're not so big but what I can do it again. Your say-so don't go in this clearing any more than Hawks' does. But I'm mortal glad to lay eyes on you. As to moving William Wilks, we'll go inside and let him decide. He's a sick man and I have to humor him."

The men exchanged veiled glances. Each understood how few were the matters which Wilks was permitted to decide. Burnham and Bridgeman entered the cabin, immaculately clean for such a structure. They found Wilks weak and dispirited. When he saw his brother-in-law he reached out a hand and faintly begged:

"Take me away from here. Nancy won't quit the cabin 'less I do. This is no place for her."

"Hoity-toity," she cried. "The Injuns will find it a mighty poor place for them. And her eyes dilated like a tree-cat's.

"Still if he'll feel better in the fort, take him in. I'll be along sometime tomorrow after I've tidied up the place."

"No, no, Nancy. You must go now," insisted Burnham.

She smiled in grim amusement at this insistence.

"Clear out, the whole parcel of you. Take William with you."

Bridgeman and his friends approached the rude bed with uneasy side glances at the amazon who stood with arms folded, her gaze leveled steadily on her brother's bony face.

"You young upstart—" she began.

"There's a young child, a girl, at the fort that we brought way from the district of Maine. She saw the Indians murder her uncle, her only relative. She needs your care, Nancy," he quietly broke in.

"In the name of goodness why did you tote a girl-child way out here for, you overgrown lummox?" she sharply demanded.

"To place her in your care, of course."

He understood his masculine sister. Denied children of her own, her iron will melted in the presence of little ones, and a tumbling baby could hold her in slavish subjection. But she never would yield an inch to a painted Abnaki. For want of something to mother she coddled her husband and treated him as if he were a fractious child. And, in truth, with her skirts tucked and generously displaying her strong legs, there was none in Fort Massachusetts who would not prefer her assistance, ax in hand, to that of her subdued husband.

When the rope had been suitably corded between the saplings and spread with blankets, it was like her to refuse all aid and, alone, to lift and gently place the sick man on the stretcher. And it was like her to loop the long ax to her right wrist and insist on carrying one end of the stretcher although this left three men to walk back empty handed.

"I've always looked after my own and always will," she stubbornly told her brother. "Once he's settled in the fort I'm coming back and spend some time here. Squirrels get in and do more mischief than a parcel of red heathens."

This determination to return to her cabin was forgotten once she reached the fort and found so many ailing. A helpless man was a child. With such a large family to engage her attention she did not see the Robson girl until the latter awoke in the evening. Once seeing her, she found the daughter she always wanted. She insisted on combing her hair and washing her face, and she watched over her during the evening meal as if she had been only a few years old. She put her to bed although Hoped-For preferred remaining up for a while.

Indefatigable, she made the rounds of the other patients, and the hour was late for border folks when she wandered to the guarded gate and found her brother smoking a pipe and discussing the war with Norton, the chaplain. She selected Norton for her first attention and told him she would prepare an herb tea in the morning which he must drink heartily of four times a day. The chaplain murmured his thanks and murmured something about his flock and glided away in the darkness.

"Family big enough to suit you, Nance?" asked Burnham.

"This is no time for your nonsense, Philip. Who is the funny looking little man with the big wig. He seems afraid of me. Always going away from a place when I come up."

"A graceless old rascal. A bloody pirate from what I've heard him tell."

"I told him I would fix up a dose to help his chest. He looks so pindling he should be careful of his lungs," she mused. "And I noticed his feet are out on the ground. I'll give him Ben Simmons' moccasins and make Ben another pair by the time he's able to be up and around."

"How is the Robson girl?"

"Gone to bed. Poor thing! She must find a good man and get married and raise a family. I told her as much."

"Good heavens, Nancy! She but a child!" he irritably exclaimed.

She smiled grimly in the darkness.

"How old do you think she is, Philip?"

"I haven't thought anything about it," he shortly replied. "I only know she's 'bout as big as my two fists and too young to hear any getting married talk."

"But you must have some ideas as to her age."

"Twelve. Possibly fourteen. I don't know. I've never given it a thought."

"She said she would be nineteen on her next birthday," she triumphantly informed him. "I was sixteen when I married Wilks."

"Nineteen on her next—see here, Nance. You're trying to make a fool of me."

"Nearly nineteen. Time she was picking out a suitable husband. And I don't intend she shall make any mistake. She comes of an honest family. She's left alone. William Wilks was eighteen when he married me. You're going on to twenty-four—"

"And dog tired," he hastily broke in. "I must make up some sleep." He knocked the heel from his pipe and turned to go to the long house.

"You should have napped this afternoon when your friends did instead of coming to fetch Wilks here. In the morning, Philip, I'll speak further with you about taking a wife. It's an act of Providence that you came here as you did. It's your duty to the province and the king."

"In the morning! In the morning!" he hurriedly repeated. "Now go to bed yourself, Nance."

"I'm staying up till midnight to spell the women. There's more sick folks than they can 'tend to."

With a good-night kiss that was plainly audible across the parade-grounds she left him to return to her patients.

BURNHAM was up early and greatly relieved to learn his sister still slept. John Perry's wife told him:

"She kept going till nearly morning. We couldn't drive her to bed. But such a sense of strength she do bring us."

"Please tell her for me, Mrs. Perry, that I'm off for Albany on Governor Shirley's business. Tell her I shall be returning soon if there's no likelihood of the expedition getting under way at once."

"Wish the army would start," she sighed. "That would give us a breathing spell. No Injuns will come down this way once the troops are marching into Canada. I'll tell your sister. Lor', but she's a wonderful woman! A masterful woman, too."

"Nancy is one of the best. And masterful," he agreed, but glancing uneasily over his shoulder. "Of course say good-by for me to the men and the Robson girl."

"A pretty little thing. Seems out of place here. The man Dresser was telling us how brave she was and how she scared the Injuns with her bagpipes and saved your lives. She'll have no trouble in finding the right man."

Burnham secured his musket and made for the gate. There he found Sergeant Hawks talking with a scout who had just come in. Hawks swung around to Burnham and began:

"Your sister didn't quit the cabin any too quick. At least one Injun was there last night."

"One wouldn't have made a mouthful for her," declared Burnham. Then anxiously, "You really believe a red scout is near as that?"

"One man surely was there, according to Smead here. He can tell you about it."

John Smead readily explained:

"I started out three hours before sunrise and scouted a good four miles up the valley road. Stopped at your sister's cabin on coming back. Saw the door was open. I'm sure it was closed when I went by the first time. Stole up the end window and looked inside, and it gave me the jumps. Dead Injun was hanging from the top of the door."

Burnham exclaimed in amazement and incredulously demanded—

"Expect me to believe that?"

"Believe it or not," sharply replied Smead. "That's what I saw through the window. I couldn't see him when standing in front of the door as the door was swung back against the wall. I scouted the woods around and found no signs except where one man had left the woods at the north side of the clearing. Only one man. He must a been some Abnaki sneaking down here to even up for the death of their chief, Cadenaret."

"But hanged to the door? It's impossible! Who did it? How could any one do it?" exploded Burnham.

"Tell me and I'll tell you. I entered the cabin long enough to make sure how the red devil had died. His neck was in a noose and the end of the rope was made fast to the cleat that holds the bar on the inside of the door. The Injun had been dragged up till his strangled neck laid over the edge of the door and the tips of his moccasins just touched the floor. He'd been scalped, too, but in a gorming fashion."

Burnham gasped, then glanced at Hawks. The sergeant curtly assured—

"If John Smead says he saw that sight, he saw it."

"An Indian won't hang himself," muttered Burnham. "They all believe the spirit leaves through the mouth. One who dies by hanging can't ever enter the Indian heaven. It's just as difficult to explain how some one hung him."

"Guess there ain't no doubt where this fellow went to," said Smead. "And the proof he died by hanging you can find by going up there and taking a look."

"I will do that now. Sergeant, I am starting for Albany at once. If the expedition isn't getting under way I shall come back here just as soon as I've had a talk with Colonel William Johnson. I'll stop at the cabin on the way."

"Bring a hoss load of powder when you come back from Albany," urged Hawks. "And a scout will go with you as far as the Wilks cabin as soon as we've had breakfast."

"I'm in a hurry. I must start now."

And before they could urge him to delay his departure he passed through the gate and trotted through the stumps to the river road.

Smead's report had astounded him. Hawks vouched for the man, nor had the borderer detected any sign of timidity in him. He was not one who would be fooled by his imagination and, in the early morning mists, see that which did not exist. But who had acted the executioner? There was no man in Fort Massachusetts who would not be quick to boast of killing an enemy. Nor could he imagine any of the defenders using a rope when he could use an ordinary weapon. The affair was grotesque and bizarre and not at all in keeping with the direct methods of a New England man. And it was senseless. Why should the slayer run the risk of a hand-to-hand encounter when he could use a bullet, ax or knife?

"Granted John Smead is a brave man, but he must have had a crazy spell," Burnham told himself as he finished the half mile.

From the edge of the clearing he saw the door was wide open and swung back to the wall, and it was impossible to see what Smead declared he had seen unless one entered or viewed the interior from the end window. But if a dead man actually was awaiting him, he would not cross the threshold until he had scouted the surrounding timber. Nor would he approach the end window. Wild notions of a trap, baited by a warrior who had died or been killed some distance from the cabin, passed through his mind. The thought was not logical, as Smead had entered and retired unharmed. Retreating into the growth he scouted from the road around the clearing and back to the road. He did not expect to discover any signs, for Smead would never have returned alive to the fort if the enemy were near.

Satisfied he was in no immediate danger he ran to the doorway and through it and wheeled about. His border-hardened nerves were not proof against the spectacle confronting him. With a smothered cry he sprang back from the dead man. The glazed stare of the protruding eyes might well have sent an unwarned visitor in headlong flight. Burnham's mind was thoroughly objective, and after the first involuntary shrinking, he began a close investigation. The dead warrior was a French Mohawk, one of the pagan New York Mohawks who had migrated to Canada after conversion by some priest. He had been recently scalped. That he had been taken by surprize and killed very suddenly was obvious. As Smead had related, he hung with his head above the top of the door, his neck drawn across it, the toes of his moccasins brushing the floor of hard earth. He rapidly reconstructed the tragedy. He saw the lone scout reconnoitering the cabin, approaching and gazing through a window. He pictured him as pushing open the door and, entirely off his guard, boldly entering in search of plunder. Then he had to introduce into the scene the mysterious some one who was in the cabin when the painted face appeared in the small opening. This some one was concealed from view, but not under the home-made bed, for he had been behind the door when it was thrown back. Then he must have been standing against the wall and beside the door all the time. When the door started to swing open the executioner was ready, and he promptly dropped the fatal noose over the half-shaved head and instantly yanked it taut and dragged the red man up the face of the door, futilely kicking.

This theory of the killing was formed in a second or two. In an equally short space of time he confirmed it, for one glance behind the door revealed the hiding place behind some winter blankets, hung on pegs. One end of the cord, which was small and which he believed his sister had utilized as a clothes-line, was secured to the cleat supporting the heavy bar. He added to his theory the fact that the executioner had warning enough of the spy's coming to prepare the gruesome welcome.

He renewed his examination of the front of the door and found nicks and gashes on the edge and several slight wounds in the swollen neck. There was an ax in the belt, but no knife. Reacting intuitively the savage had pulled his knife the instant he felt the noose and had endeavored to cut the line above his head. He looked about on the floor but could not find the knife. He noted, also, that the sheath was missing.

"This is the strangest thing I ever heard tell of," he muttered as he warily spied through the window preliminary to returning to the road.

The woods were empty of danger and he ran to the road and continued down the valley. He would have returned to the fort and conferred with his friends and the men of the garrison if he had not been satisfied no companions of the dead scout were in the vicinity; also if not for fears of his sister's matrimonial plans.

AS HE pressed on down the road, his tall angular figure, slightly leaning forward, the only form of life visible, he found his mind endeavoring to dwell on two lines of thought at one and the same time. Who killed the Mohawk in such an unusual manner? And whoever would have imagined Hoped-For Robson was going on nineteen? His bony face reddened under the bronze of tan as he recalled his treatment of her, based on the supposition she was a child.

A strong man for border work, both provincial and hostile red man would have decided, could either have seen the deerskin-clad figure covering the ground with the curious gliding lope of the forest taught. A fearless man, would have been the verdict of friend or foe as the fur-capped head swung from side to side in ceaseless espionage of the river bank and the growth on the right. And yet, while searching the broken country for a possible danger, Burnham's thoughts were not ferocious, nor even of war.

"Good land!" he groaned as he spared a second glance to make sure there was no menace in the sudden flight of some water birds. "What if Nancy already has told her to pick me out as a suitable husband! Lord! That little thing getting married! Just ridiculous. All eyes. No bigger than my two fists. Nance is a fool. She wants to manage everything. And she didn't understand. The child is a child. Going on to nineteen! Just as I am going on to a hundred. Nance always was prime meddler. But why the——should she pick on me?"

Mumbling and complaining in this fashion, he hastened on, but never was there a moment when his hunter's sense was not reading and classifying the voices of the forest. Without changing his trend of querulous thought, he paused long enough to learn the hysterical scolding of some squirrels boded no ill for him. But when some five miles below the Wilks place he halted abruptly, and the brows over the big nose wrinkled inquiringly and he dismissed his sister Nancy and Hoped-For Robson from his mind as the unmistakable sound of voices came from beyond the wooded bend ahead. The sound was faint, and the town bred would have missed it.

Burnham examined the pan of his musket and stepped from the road, moving as lightly as a shadow. The deep-set eyes glowed in anticipation of a discovery. He scouted nearer the bend and waited. Now he knew white men were talking. He waited several minutes for them to turn the bend or approach near enough for him to learn if they were Frenchmen. But the owners of the voices remained stationary, as evidenced by the sounds neither growing louder nor fainter.

Falling back into the growth he advanced in a line that would bring him out well above the wooded bend. When abreast of the talkers' position he heard enough to satisfy him they were neither French nor Dutch, although he could not as yet distinguish what they were saying. He scouted toward them and suddenly halted, the wariness dropping from him as abruptly as a man can discard a blanket, and his dark stern face became boyishly inquisitive. For he heard one say:

"You're a prime one, mister. Think of you smelling out that rum! All the time I've been mewed up in that fort I couldn't find a drop! Lordy! But I'd love to have a likely pack of Injuns come along this minute."

"You're a rare lad! It takes the drink to put a brave heart into one, my boy. Jolly Ned Teach would have loved you. Ah!

but he was a man! Mixed gunpowder with his grog before boarding. Fussed like a lady in curling his long beard till it bristled like so many little snakes and made him look like the devil! What a way he had! What a way!"

"I don't know nothing about your Teach, mister. But if he was here and itched for a fuss, I'd show him."

"Aye, now? Would you? It would be taking hold of the hand of Death. But your words are brave. You're a roaring boy after my own heart. And Ned Teach took no liberties with Ben Tugg. Oh, no. He used to say, 'Somewhat undersized, maybe. But so is a Panama snake.' Many a rare boy went against him and woke up in ——. But here's old Ben, alive and hearty. Now the jug, my lad. Let me hold it a bit. Not but what I admire the way you take to it."

"Just like milk to a babe. When Albany passed a law that all the liquor at Oswego must be inspected regular, I was named to do the testing. They was watering the rum they give the poor Indians in a sinful measure. The Indians complained bitterly. What was first my duty come to be a pleasure. You feed me enough rum or brandy and I'll take all Canada single handed."

"Ho! ho! Ned Teach, are you near me? Then you hear this slashing lad. Aye, aye, sir. Of course he will sing. Now with me, my sharp blade. Jolly Ned is waiting to have his ears tickled by the old song."

"I'd rather fight ten men. But I'll sing."

And the two began roaring out the spirited ballad. Amazed at finding the men so far from the fort, Burnham waited, undecided whether to steal away and resume his journey or break from cover. Curiosity to know where they had procured the rum and the kindling of a ridiculous suspicion in the back of his mind decided him.

" 'It is better to swim in the sea below,
Than to hang in the air and to feed the crow,'
Said Jolly Ned Teach of Bristol."

As they shouted this finale, the borderer stood beside them. Tugg, with a jug thrown over his arm and a knife in his other hand, gaped as if seeing an apparition. Till, formerly liquor-tester at the trading house at Oswego, stared at the newcomer truculently. And there was no nervous jerking of his limbs now.

"My big lad! My bold lad!" cried Tugg, the first to speak.

"But he doesn't share in the rum," growled Till.

And Burnham marveled to observe the formerly cringing, nerve-shaken creature was bellicose of eye.

Squatting on his heels Burnham pleasantly inquired—

"From what cabin did you two worthies steal that jug?"

"I'll answer no questions!" angrily cried Till. "You're no —— sergeant to ask Inspector Till any questions."

"Gently and softly, my boy," murmured Tugg. To Burnham he politely said, "All houses in this poor land look so much alike we couldn't pick out one from another."

And he endeavored to hide a sly, evil grin.

Burnham forgot his interest in the jug. Rather, he had discovered whence it came once he glanced at the knife Tugg had been flourishing.

"Tugg, where's the sheath to that knife?" he sharply demanded.

"Tell him to go to —— and take his big nose with him," advised Till.

"Gently and softly, my lad. Never shall a knife-sheath come between me and an old friend."

And from under his leg he produced a beaded sheath.

Burnham glanced at the design and remarked:

"The owner of this belonged to the Beaver Clan. See the circle with the legs protruding and two beads for the head? He was a French Mohawk."

"Aye, aye. Now that comes of knowing books," muttered Tugg, his gaze growing a bit wild. "And what else does the sheath tell you, my lion of a lad?"

"That the owner of it died by hanging."

Tugg made a choking noise in his throat and frantically drank from the jug, one old eye staring at Burnham fearfully.

"Lord be merciful!" whispered Till, his rum courage failing him in the presence of this strange power. "If I'd guessed the —— knife could talk—"

Burnham tossed back the sheath and commanded—

"Now you two tell me how you ever managed to hang that Mohawk over the edge of the door in my sister's cabin."

CHAPTER VI

ON THE ALBANY WATERFRONT

THERE is a never-ending charm about the waterfront of any community, and the river life at Albany was one of the most fascinating phases of that ancient town. The arrival and departure of every boat was a potential mystery to the three travelers from Fort Massachusetts as they sat in an eating house on the bank of the river and watched the shifting scene.

Nearly all the river craft was owned in Albany, and during the season, from April to November, earned a rich profit. With a favoring wind from the south the up-river boats presented a beautiful picture as they proudly swept on to an anchorage. They afforded commodious cabin accommodations, and the travelers waved and cheered as their journey reached its end. Because of the ice annually scrubbing the banks there were no quays, and cargoes were landed in long dugout canoes, with a man standing at each end while skilfully wielding the paddle.

Boats arriving from New York were empty except for passengers and the usual cargo of sugar-cane rum. The latter was considered to be an absolute necessity, not only for the Indian trade but also because of the popular belief one thrived on it while inviting death by drinking French brandy. Men returning from the Louisburg expedition had encouraged this fallacy by telling how their companions remained hale and hearty although consuming much rum, but soon succumbed after a drinking bout on brandy. It reminded Burnham of the general prejudice against potatoes and the North Yarmouth belief that death would surely follow seven years' diet of that vegetable. Not that Albany shared this hostility to potatoes, as large crops were planted and kept in ashes during the winter, although the Bermuda potatoes, while growing well, spoiled before spring.

Boats dropping down to New York carried wheat flour, peas, timber and furs. Much of the peltry was smuggled in from Canada by connivance of Albany merchants. War had not yet interrupted this surreptitious and illegal trade.

A boat with a white oak bottom, which would not readily split if run on rocks, and sides of red cedar, which split easily, anchored near the eating house on the bank and discharged a passenger, who made direct for the small room where the men from New England were eating hung beef and drinking cider. There were other passengers, but they were townspeople, stout merchants who hurried on to their places of business on the side of the long hill.

The newcomer attracted the three travelers' attention by the oddity of his dress. His coat was new, gorgeous with braid and gilt buttons, but the waistcoat was disreputable. Fine silk stockings met breeches of coarse material which were worn and stained. The shoes, likewise, were old and broken, but the hat and wig were new. The wearer of the mixed wardrobe was a young man, keen of eye. His shrewd survey of the travelers suggested a precocious sophistication. He took a seat in a corner and ate ravenously of the food placed before him. Tugg eyed him approvingly and attempted conversation. Repulsed by silence he finished a long drink and resumed talking to Till, saying:

"Now there's a craft, my bold boy." And he pointed to the newly arrived boat. "That would give snug lodgings. And what an easy craft to board, my slashing lad! Why, a blind man could swarm over the side and cut her out in no time!"

The stranger tilted his head a trifle and half turned as if to face the speaker. Burnham warned— "That sort of talk will get you into trouble if the Dutchman understands English."

"Bah! That swab! We ain't in Massachusetts now. And too many of the Red Brethren of the coast have found anchorage here and down the river to be afraid of the watch. As for this tapster he'd join with us if he could see a fat profit. It was Robert Livingston of New York who sent Kidd to Bellomont and spoke highly of him."

"To —— with him!" hoarsely growled Till.

The proprietor apparently did not understand this exchange, yet he quickly withdrew to the tiny shed where he did his cooking. The stranger now twisted his head, revealing a young face, and cast a whimsical glance at Tugg and immediately resumed eating.

Tugg stared at the newcomer for a moment, then turned to cursing the dugouts, although they were good for ten years if properly painted and tarred. He finally confessed to the room that his prejudice was confined to the fact the paddlers stood instead of being seated. Which, he profanely declared, was a land-lubberly thing to do.

Burnham was much interested in the many *bateaux* as he supposed they were being collected for the Lakes George and Champlain end of the Canada expedition. These were made of white pine, flat of bottom and sharp at both ends. With their almost perpendicular sides standing two feet high and with a breadth of forty-two inches in the middle, they were the ideal craft for carrying military stores over the water-road to Canada, as they had always been for carrying trade goods to the Indian villages. But his interest in these lessened as he failed to see any of them in the process of being ladened.

In short, after a careful survey of the river, he discovered nothing that indicated the expedition was forward. He interrogated his host on this point, and the man shrugged his shoulders and, in broken English, declared that the wheat flour of Albany was the best in North America, with the possible exception of Esopus, which he called "The King's Town," and brought several more shillings the hundred weight than any from any other place.

Burnham was ready to believe the bread deserved its reputation, having eaten a huge loaf of it, but resented the man's indifference to the war. He asked for news, explaining he had just arrived from the East. Again the ponderous shoulders rose and fell and, in a speech difficult to understand, the proprietor boasted that such huge quantities of wheat were sown by Dutch and German farmers around the town as to permit the brewers to make their malt of it. The farmers would not bother with barley, he continued; nor would they raise oats beyond enough to supply the owners' horses. Wheat and peas were the crops, only the beetles were destroying the latter. He was sad of visage as he told this, although he must have been forewarned; for already Pennsylvania, New Jersey and the lower part of New York province had been infested by these beetles.

The newcomer suddenly twisted about from his small stable and fiercely accused—

"You think more of your —— pea-crop than you do about the Indians burning and killing within sight of this town."

"That's the way to talk to that lubber," roared Tugg, snatching off his big wig and smashing it on the table. "He oughter have his weazen slit! You've got the way of a bold boy, my lad."

The proprietor stared wildly at the cropped ears and edged towards the shed-kitchen. Burnham sought to detain him by asking news of Colonel William Johnson, and for an answer received a sullen shake of the head. The young man in the corner called over his shoulder—

"Man on the boat said Colonel Johnson was doubtless up at the fort making ready for a big Indian council next month."

BURNHAM thanked him and went outside and wandered along the river bank and endeavored to perfect the details of the plan which had been in his head for six months. He got nowhere with his brooding, no more than he had while struggling with the problem during his travels through the Champlain country and through the forests of New England. He could express the purpose of it in half a dozen words. It was impossible to plot the many steps leading to the dramatic climax. There were but two men in the province he would reveal it to—Johnson and Governor Clinton.

He wandered along the bank under the fringe of tall water-beeches, best of shade trees, and desperately attempted to clothe the skeleton of his idea. Around him, grateful for the shade, grazed cattle. Clouds of mosquitoes hovered over these. There was the water-poplar, and wild prune trees, heavy with unripe fruit. Sumac, too, was plentiful, and a confusion of vines among the trees and covering long stretches of the bank promised a harvest of grapes once the first frost had turned their acidity to sweetness. Back a bit towered American elms, and Burnham shifted his course toward these as the mosquitoes discovered him.

"How can a man think with these furies eating him up!" he growled in disgust as he retreated into the town.

He entered the Market, a street five times wider than any other thoroughfare. At one end stood the Dutch church and at the other the English.

Finding his musket cumbersome he turned into a gunsmith's shop and asked permission to leave it. The man nodded, then added—

"If you're staying in town I can let you lodgings."

"I'm glad to take them. I expect to be here several days. You seem to be very busy."

And he glanced about at the guns completed and those ready for the stocks.

"Busy enough," said the man without looking up from his work. "But I'll be idle soon if my forge charcoal doesn't come. Should have been here two days ago. I use only that made from black pine."

Burnham spoke of the pea-beetle, the wheat crops and the possibility of the town being attacked by the Indians. The man answered, when at all, in monosyllables. Only once did he turn from his work, and that was when Burnham suggested the Indians had killed the charcoal man. He said a few words in Dutch. Burnham shook his head. He understood a few phrases but not enough to converse so long as the other could talk in English. After a few minutes the smith said:

"I don't think they've caught Joe. But they come very close. But Joe knows their ways. He knows the woods. Almost like a wild creature."

In a rambling, detached way he spoke of his work and, among other statements, said wild cherry was best for musket stocks. Burnham declared for black walnut. The smith replied this walnut did not grow near Albany and that if it did, he would prefer the cherry. His second choice was red maple.

"I love the red maple," said Burnham.

"Now you talk like a man who loves guns. But wild cherry is best for stocks!"

"I love the red maple because the underside of the leaves in a wind makes the tree look like it was filled with white flowers."

The smith stared blankly for a moment, then grunted in disgust and muttered—

"Might have expected such foolishness from one carrying an old Queen Anne."

Scenting a possible profit, he straightened and nodded toward a richly mounted piece measuring five feet, nine inches in length and weighing fifteen pounds.

"There's the gun for you," he cried.

It was a beautiful piece of work. The woodwork was curly maple and was carved in a handsome fashion, while the brass mountings were quite exquisitely engraved. Burnham examined it approvingly and recognized it as a model used by wealthy men as a sporting piece. It was not made to accommodate a bayonet.

"Too heavy for my work. Too long," he said. "Besides, a poor man can't afford such a gun."

"It is a costly gun," agreed the smith. "But the war has upset things a lot. I'll sell it to you for your musket and thirty pounds. That's very cheap."

Burnham was interested. He believed that he could sell the gun at a profit once peace was restored. And the expedition to Canada would bring peace before another summer. He examined the gun more closely and remarked—

"I haven't money, but I have scalps."

The smith pursed his lips and slowly replied:

"Our Assembly has voted a bounty for scalps but hasn't voted any money to pay the bounties. I'd have to wait some time for my money. Yet I believe we can trade."

Burnham held the gun close to his eyes and said:

"You didn't make this gun. It came from Massachusetts."

The smith's eyes narrowed.

"I never said I made it. Of course I didn't make it. It was made ten or twenty years ago. But it's scarcely been used and is as good as new. The man I bought it of said it came from one of our patroons."

And he left his bench and stood beside Burnham and stared at the gun. The borderer indicated some barely discernible scratches under the trigger-guard.

"You can scarcely make them out unless you hold it in the right light. See! D. J. Salem."

"Does look like it," agreed the smith as he returned to his bench. "Bought it of a man who said he was back from Louisburg. Probably he got it up there instead of from a patroon. I'll trade for the scalps and wait for my money."

Burnham shook his head.

"Too heavy. Too long for the forest. There's a man down in Pennsylvania who's turning out a gun that shoots a small bullet. Deckert or Deckard. Some name like that. I've heard forest runners talk about him and his guns. Deadly accurate at a hundred yards. The work of the Pennsylvania men with their rifles at Louisburg has taught us, I believe, that the rifled gun will take the place of the musket within very few years."

Before the smith could complete his inclination to denounce the new American weapon which was destined to play such an important part in extending all frontiers, a small, wiry man, brown as the shell of a walnut, came through the back door and began—

"*Von über bringer hab ein stück silber—*"*

"No time to bother with that," sharply interrupted the smith. Then he added a few rapid sentences in Dutch of which Burnham caught only, "*De verdronkene landen.*"

The man darted a sharp glance at Burnham and darted out the way he had come. The smith asked—

"So you don't think you want that gun?"

"Too handsome for my work. It's a gun that Governor Clinton might carry on a hunting trip."

"Clinton!" sneered the smith. "He's too busy scolding the Assembly to do anything else. All he does is to find fault and scold even after it's been resolved to help him in every reasonable way."

It was on Burnham's tongue to remind that, in adopting the generous resolution, the Assembly refused to grant the governor any powers whatever, and had objected to practically every measure of defense and offense he had urged. But the borderer knew that he would accomplish nothing by arguing with the smith beyond losing his lodgings and possibly finding it difficult to secure others. He left the shop and entered State Street to climb the hill to the fort.

Many of the houses had their gable ends to the street. These fronts were of brick while the other walls usually were of wood. White pine shingles or tiles brought from Holland covered the sharply pitched roofs. And some of the dwellings were of stone. A few of the streets were paved and many were lined with trees. The doors, usually in the middle of the houses, had seats on both sides and, as it was near sunset, there was much visiting back and forth. This was a pleasing picture of neighborliness. Only Burnham heard but little English spoken as he passed these little gatherings.

A closer inspection of the town revealed certain drawbacks to a visitor. To protect the walls from the rain many house gutters extended nearly to the middle of the street and in wet weather must have made that portion of a thoroughfare very disagreeable. Despite proverbial Dutch cleanliness some of the streets were in a filthy condition owing to the stabling of the cattle there during the summer nights.

FORT Frederick at the top of the slope was of stone, and massively built. It loomed high and was glorified by the setting sun. And yet its situation, although commanding the town, was bad from a military point of view as it, in turn, was commanded by higher hills in the west.

Burnham walked slowly, and was greatly interested in each phase of life after his long sojourn in the wilderness. He saw men hurrying to deliver packs of beaver before the merchants' stores were closed. He knew well enough that much of this peltry was from French merchants although the law imposed a heavy penalty for illicit trading. But come war, come peace, there was seldom any interruption of smuggling between Albany and Montreal.

He passed tiny shops busy with the manufacture of Indian wampum. He entered one place to buy a gay kerchief to wear on his head in place of his fur cap, but came out empty-handed after discovering the merchant was charging him the stranger's price or several times the ordinary price. Negro servants were running back and forth on their masters' business. Some one had died and left an estate, and he passed a poster with its crude, pathetic black figures and the announcement:

Men, women and children to be sold cheap.

Rich merchants were leaving town for their country estates. Much of the city's dress was English, but the language and manners remained Dutch.

As he neared the gateway of the fort, he beheld a man passing the sentinels and leading his horse. He hurried up the slope, as even at a distance there was no mistaking the strong features of Colonel William Johnson. The latter, beholding a forest runner, refrained from mounting and waited.

"This is rare luck for me, Colonel Johnson," greeted Burnham.

Johnson gave him a second sharp glance and with a gracious smile thrust out his hand and said:

"I thought you were in New England,

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*"From a messenger I have received a piece of silver money."

Burnham. Your coming may be a bit of luck for me. I can always use a sound man. But if you come to ask instead of give, your request must be modest. I've stripped Mount Johnson bare to satisfy my Mohawk scouts. I'm here on the old, hopeless errand—help from the Assembly. What's on your mind?"

Burnham turned to walk beside him and, after withdrawing out of hearing of the sentinels, he commenced:

"You may set me down as crazy, but for some time my mind has been filled with a plan. Trouble is I can't think how to begin it. In few words it's this—kill or kidnap John Cour*. So long as he stays in the Seneca country he will make more trouble for us than half a hundred strong war parties from Montreal."

He paused, abashed by the daring of his own proposal.

"By ——, sir! You've got a head!" softly exclaimed Colonel Johnson. "Not that your suggestion is new, but it shows you think close and straight. At a recent council held in his Excellency's Greenwich house the matter was discussed. His Excellency would shed no tears on learning John Cour had been bought, stolen or had died."

"Why, then! Let's be about it," eagerly urged Burnham. "With a few scouts I'll guarantee to steal him out of the Seneca village or—"

He did not finish.

"Or?" repeated Colonel Johnson. "Exactly."

And he stared down the hill at the river while his inner gaze was ranging to the west, far beyond Mount Johnson on the Mohawk. He was beholding Joncaire, the elder, dead these last seven years, yet living again in his sons, Chabert and Philippe. For many years father and sons had thwarted the plans of the English. Joncaire, the elder had been an elusive, tantalizing figure—now here, now there, but always with a strong grip on the Senecas, strongest of the tribes in the Long House. Seldom working in the open, yet always working, he had blocked royal governors and dealt failure to many a high hope of the English Crown. He had died, and his two sons, especially Chabert, were smoothly carrying on the work for France. This man and his sons, and not the titled rulers of New France, had made it possible for the French to secure a hold on the Niagara country. Because of the diplomacy and astuteness of this family, and not due to any leadership displayed by royal governors, France maintained the trade advantages she secured in the New World.

Originally Joncaire, the elder went to the Senecas as a captive. He was adopted as a son. The Senecas considered his children to be Senecas. This family of humble birth exerted an influence over the Warders of the Great Black Door that affected the history of New York province for half a century, and only in a lesser degree shaped the development of the other northern colonies.

With a shake of his head Colonel Johnson slowly declared:

"Burnham, it would be worth an army and more than a million pounds to his Majesty if old John Cour had never come to New France. That family has had it too much its own way."

"They never had any opposition till you went to the Mohawk country to live."

"Burnham, you speak like a courtier. But I know you can fight. I've been hot for what you propose. And I've been against it."

"Against it?" puzzled Burnham, his hopes dropping.

"Whenever I wonder what they would do did they learn we had removed the son of their Sononchiez† by gold, theft or otherwise. They're neutral now. That's the most John Cour can accomplish. And that's more than other Frenchmen can do. But I wonder what would happen to that neutrality if the Senecas blamed us for the loss of the son of their adopted son, therefore their grandson. And I wonder what would happen to us if they ever, for any cause, picked up the French ax. But I'm glad you thought of it. It shows you are eager to serve, and can think."

"But you don't approve?"

"It's hard to decide now what one will find best to do some time in the future. We can't seek to remove John Cour now by bribery or otherwise. My scouts report he has left the Seneca country and is either on the Niagara or in Montreal. When I speak of buying him away from the French it's only a way of speaking. All who know him and his father and brothers know he can't be bribed. So, what would influence my judgment now might have no influence by the time he comes back through the Western Door. For example, a successful invasion of Canada would permit me to feel indifferent toward John Cour. If the expedition failed and the far west tribes poured in, thinking we were whipped, why, I'd go out to trap the —— himself."

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*Daniel de Joncaire, Sieur de Chabert et de Clausonne, seventh child of Louis Thomas de Joncaire. Called Joncaire-Chabert, also Chabert de Joncaire. Johnson seldom spelled a French name correctly, and his papers give many variations of "Joncaire."

Writers have confused the part played by the father with work done by his sons.

†Seneca name for Joncaire, the elder.

Burnham was disappointed. He ruefully said:

"Then I'll be joining the expedition. I'd hoped to catch that slippery Frenchman. It was too big a dream."

"Not big at all when we remember the wild dream that ended with the capture of Louisburg. Just now I'm praying the Montreal expedition isn't a dream."

Now Burnham was gaping in amazement.

"Why, Colonel Johnson! At least that's real enough. New England talks of nothing else. The troops from Gibraltar may even now be on the water, bound for the mouth of the St. Lawrence. Massachusetts voted three thousand volunteers last month, the men to share in all the booty and to receive three pounds in bills of credit and be exempt from impresses for two years after their return. The troops for the Champlain-Richelieu route will soon be camping around this hill."

"I wish I had your faith," grimly replied the colonel, frowning down on the town. "His Excellency hasn't been able yet to induce the Assembly to provide for transporting supplies even to Albany. Our condition here is deplorable because of the mad opposition to his Excellency. Captains with beating orders* are finding it difficult to fill their companies because of the influence of the strong party opposed to the war and thinking only of trade profits. Chief Justice De Lancy is against anything his Excellency may propose. Others of our leadingest men are the same. They are like one who will burn his hands from his arms for the sake of pushing another into a fire. The Assembly now threatens to take all public gun-powder into its custody†. It's preached here in Albany that the invasion of Canada is the Crown's expedition, that it's for the Crown to pay, clothe and feed the troops. There will be a big council here next month, and no presents for the Indians have been provided."

Burnham cried—

"The Assembly should be made to give aid!"

COLONEL JOHNSON smiled grimly at his earnestness and reminded:

"But the Assembly holds the whip-hand. Every warrior returning to Mount Johnson from a scout must be reclothed. Blankets, moccasins, leggings, shirts, powder, bullets and gun if his be lost or broken. That must be done. I have managed so far, but —— knows it's almost been impossible at times. While at war at our request the warrior's families must be fed. They have been fed. When a scalp is brought in, the bounty must be paid. My place is overrun with Indians. I must pay on the dot, for they have our promise. If I could have funds, I could place a thousand red fighting men in the field in a month. And the Assembly won't even grant a few pieces of blue Camblet cloth."

"Well, good lord!" muttered Burnham. "I'd heard there was some difficulties, but didn't dream it was so bad as that. What are we coming to? What can we do?"

The colonel threw up his head and quietly reassured—

"We're going to whip the French."

"But if the expedition fails to get started?"

"We'll capture Crown Point, that —— plague spot."

Shrugging his shoulders Burnham gloomily decided:

"I might as well have stayed on the Hoosac. My sister and her sick husband are there. I'll go back to them if the expedition isn't going forward soon."

"Wait a bit. You came here, eager to do your king a service. You're a borderer. Why not scout above Saratoga, as close to Crown Point as you can safely get, and learn what the French are up to? I'll send Gingego, a Mohawk war-chief with you."

"I'll go."

"Good. Now I'll speak further. Six of my Mohawks scouted to the St. Lawrence and brought back a New England settler who had escaped from Montreal. Found him starving in the woods. They left him at Half Moon. He sent me a bit of writing, saying that Rigaud de Vaudreuil, town-major of Three Rivers, is to join the De Muy brothers, who are already on Champlain. Rigaud's orders are to defend Fort St. Frederic if he finds it threatened. If not, he is to attack Schenectady. My Mohawks will have Schenectady covered from the head of Lake George. You will scout to the east of the lake to discover any force coming that way, through the Drowned Lands—"

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*Recruiting orders. Recruiting stimulated by drums.

†So voted in 1747.

"*De verdronkene landen!*" excitedly cried Burnham.

Johnson stared at him curiously and said—

"Why, yes. That's the Dutch for it."

"*Von über bringer hab ein stück silber*—"

"What the devil are you getting at? 'From the messenger I have received a piece of silver money.' What do you mean?"

Burnham quickly told of the brown-faced man who had burst through the back door of the gunsmith's shop, and added—

"I can only catch a sentence here and there of Dutch."

Colonel Johnson was silent for a moment, then said—

"Small? Rat of a man?"

Burnham nodded. "That's Stirick. Smuggler. How many guns did the smith have completed?"

"A dozen, I should say. There were almost as many more ready to be fitted to the stocks."

"You've doubled your errand. Watch for Stirick up north. Watch for those guns. If you find them and can't fetch them back, destroy them. When you leave your lodgings in the morning notice if the guns are still in the shop. Gingego will be waiting for you just outside the town."

He shook hands with Burnham and mounted and took his way while the borderer walked back to the river for a mug of cider and supper. As he neared the small eating house he heard a loud outcry ahead and he saw several men disappearing down the river bank. He followed their example, and reached the river in time to see half a dozen men getting in each other's way in an attempt to board a pine dugout. At first he could not discover the cause of the confusion, but received some enlightenment when the proprietor of the eating place thrust a long pistol through the back window and discharged it. Shifting his gaze he beheld three men paddling desperately for the east bank.

Returning to the front of the eating place, he entered. The proprietor, with head and shoulders thrust through the window, was hoarsely crying orders to the men stumbling about the dugout. When he ceased his clamor and drew back into the room Burnham ordered cheese, bread and cider and asked:

"What's happened here? Why did you shoot?"

"Shoot?" hoarsely cried the man. "I shot to kill. Trouble? Trouble that will give the hangman a job when those rascals are caught. I've been robbed. By no less than John Boyce, counterfeiter of bills of credit. I discounted ten Rhode Island bills of twenty shillings each for the villain. He was drinking with two other men. One had his ears cut off and sang wicked songs. I'd never have changed the bills, but he bought much rum. Then the captain of the last boat up from New York came and warned me that John Boyce was thought to be in town, told me to look out for any stranger offering provincial bills of credit. Said he fled from New York after passing a lot of New York half-crown notes. I went to my strong box, remembering the bills. The rascal got up and made for the door. I cried for the other two to stop him. They ran after him, the man in the big wig waving a broken sword. He was yelling to me to wait. That they'd have him. And what do you think?"

Burnham shook his head.

"Why, that undersized limb of the —— tossed his sword into a dugout. Then he and his friend helped the robber paddle across the river. But I've sent word to the fort, and horsemen will ride up the west bank and head them off."

CHAPTER VII

TRAILING

CARRYING only their weapons, blankets and packs of bread and cooked meat Gingego, famous war-chief of the Mohawks and Burnham started up the river road on the west side of the Hudson. They were outside the hill town before the sun had completed climbing above the wooded hills and were passing by fields of yellow and white wheat, of flax and corn.

On beholding the chief, Burnham had said in Mohawk—

"I am the man Waraghjago* sent."

The Mohawk had as briefly replied—

"Waraghjago told Gingego to be here."

Then in silence they traveled, passing through the flats as barnyard roosters importantly summoned the sun to attend on the new day. Their way skirted the steep bank of the river, the bank being protected from erosion by many large elms. Wild vines explored the tops of these trees and hung in green and brown draperies as well as carpeting the banks and overrunning the numerous islands. Closed to the eastern shore a long dugout was floating down stream. Burnham remarked—

"More French beaver for Albany."

Gingego had nothing to say until they were five miles along the road and opposite the falls of Winant's Kill, when he asked—

"Where are the guns that go to Montreal?"

"The guns started some time in the night. They were not in the smith's house when I left. They went by boat."

"They are far ahead. They will go slow when they have to walk through the woods to Lake George," said the chief.

They were at the limit of tide water, and had passed quite a few farms with the barns built after the Dutch fashion, having the threshing-floor in the middle, with mows for hay and straw, and stable room for the stock on each side. Some of the houses were of wood, some were of unburned brick covered with wood on the outside; and practically all were deserted. And there were heaps of charred logs and mounds of ashes where houses had stood, silent testimony of the enemy's daring in raiding within sight of the town.

The way was pleasant and usually shaded by elms, red maples and the water-beech. The river view was often cut off by a profusion of sumac, vines and willows. More than once Burnham, or his companion, slipped through the tangle down to the river's edge to obtain an unobstructed view of the river. But they could discover nothing of the smugglers and their cargo of guns.

They halted at a small house above Winant's Kill to eat and make inquiries. The house was under a high hill, and was deserted. On the slopes above, where the hot summer sun had killed the grass and baked the earth in open places, stood sturdy mullein stocks, indifferent to drouth and immune from grazing cattle. Gingego said these were like his people and could not be conquered or driven from their ancient homes. The owner or tenant of the farm had put in his crops, and clouds of white-backed maize thieves were riotously raiding the planted fields. Satisfied there was none there to supply information, they continued their journey. They halted briefly at several other homes of Dutch settlers only to find the farms deserted under the blight of the red terror.

In about an hour's travel from the farm above Winant's Kill they were passing the three mouths of the Mohawk. From habit Gingego tilted his head to catch the tumbling roar of the Cohoes falls, although he knew but little water was running over the black rocks now. The Hudson was shallowing rapidly, and inshore, where dugouts would travel to avoid the current, the depth was scarcely two feet and sometimes only one.

Gingego halted on the bank and searched the upper reaches eagerly, saying—

"Guns go slow now."

But although they often examined the upper river, they saw nothing of the smugglers' boat, and were compelled to believe the guns were started up river early in the preceding evening and with enough men along to make the trip a quick one.

Burnham was disappointed, but the Mohawk comforted him by declaring they would overtake the guns after they left the river to journey through the thick woods.

Gingego began sniffing the air. Burnham's nostrils had likewise been offended by the stench of dead sturgeons stranded along the bank. These fish, the Mohawk pointed out, had been wounded by spears and had escaped only to die of their hurts. The chief pointed up the river and announced:

"Brother of Waraghjago, some of my people are on that island. They go there and camp when spearing fish by torch-light. They had been drying the slices in the sun. Come to our houses in the winter and you eat them. We will stop and talk with them."

"They must have seen the men and guns pass."

"Their camp is on the east side. They

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*Johnson.

would not be seen or heard if they passed softly on this side. We will talk to them and tell them to go to Half Moon and take a sick white man down to Albany. Waraghjago has said it."

When abreast of the island, Gingego slipped down the vine-covered bank and sounded a shrill cry. After he repeated this several times several men and women came through the bushes and answered the signal. Although the day was hot, the men were wearing bright green blankets and thigh-leggings of cloth. Two men entered a pine dugout and rapidly paddled to the bank. These men had the upper part of the forehead and the cheeks painted with vermilion. Gingego lost no time in telling them Waraghjago would pay twenty shillings to have a sick white man at Half Moon paddled down the river to the fort in Albany. They accepted the statement as an order and bowed their heads. Then the chief asked:

"Has a long wooden canoe gone up stream in the night? There would be three or five men in it and bundles of new guns."

"The dogs barked," repeated the older of the two Indians. "One of our young men got up. He saw nothing. He thought he heard a paddle."

"One paddle or a fish jumping," adding the second Indian.

"A man of the Ga-ne-a-ga-o-no* should know who passes his fire at night," sternly said the chief.

"It was only one paddle going up the river or a fish jumping," defended the younger of the Indians.

"Montreal Indians have killed and burned below this place. You will not know when paddles come down the river," warned the chief.

"At night our fires are covered. By day our eyes are open," said the older man. "There are no houses on the islands. If Montreal Indians and the French come, they will stop up there to burn a white house and then kill the white man. We shall know if they are near. We can paddle to the thick woods on the other shore or go down the river. No French Indians will catch us."

"Waraghjago says the white man at Half Moon must come away now. He has spoken. We will meet you there. Go at once," said Gingego.

The two paddled back to their island. The chief and Burnham ascended the bank and advanced but a short distance before discovering the house. It was a tiny house of one room and set back from the river and under a steep hill. The hill was thickly covered with American elders and had the travelers been two or three weeks earlier they would have found them white with elder blossoms, presenting a beautiful sight. The house, with the exception of the side facing the river, was enclosed by the forest.

The owner of the house sat in the doorway, a gun beside him. He was enjoying a pipe, and appeared to be oblivious to the clouds of mosquitoes enveloping him. Burnham greeted him and inquired—

"Did any white men bound up the river call here in the night?"

"Before midnight. May they roast in ——!" was the wrathful reply.

Burnham had the gun smugglers in mind and was puzzled. He did not believe the smugglers could have traveled this far before midnight. The man angrily continued:

"They found my rum and drank it. They stayed an hour, eating and drinking. They made free with my bread and meat. The one with a broken sword said he would cut my throat if I objected. —— take them! That is, except the one honest man of the three. On leaving he gave me twenty shillings, a Rhode Island bill."

Burnham understood, and he muttered:

"The poor drunken fools! They will find their hair hanging over a kettle to give the broth a good taste."

"May two of them come to a bad end!" cried the farmer. "The third man was a gentleman in bad company. He tried to make it right. He gave me twenty shillings."

"I fear they will all come to a bad end," said Burnham. "And don't try to change the Rhode Island bill into hard money. It's worthless."

"Worthless? Twenty shillings worthless?" cried the farmer, and he tore at his shaggy hair with his free hand. "Then may that villain be the first to roast!"

"He's a slippery ——. But how do you dare stay here, neighbor?"

"White rascals bother me more than the French and Indians," was the morose answer. Then, jerking his thumb toward the north, "But if the French do come they'll burn Half Moon first, or what's left of it.

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*Mohawk.

I'll see the light and slip back to a hiding-place on the mountain. I don't sleep in the house, but back in the woods."

They left him, and Gingego said—

"It was not the men with the guns who drank the rum and ate the bread and meat."

"No. They were men who came from Fort Massachusetts to Albany with me, sad rogues. They joined a third man, who makes worthless paper money. The three escaped from Albany in a dugout, heading up the river. But I didn't think the fools would come this far.

THEY soon covered the short distance to Half Moon, abandoned in King William's war and intermittently garrisoned and abandoned ever since. They found one militiaman in charge of the weak stockade and several small huts. He was dubious of his military standing and complained:

"Seems like I was plumb forgotten. No orders come. No rations. No pay. I'm going down to Albany and find out if I'm in the army or just plumb forgotten. Three men, who was posted here with me, went down the river two weeks ago. And I'd gone before this if it wasn't for that sick man Johnson's Mohawks fetched in and left on my hands."

"Two Mohawks are coming with a canoe to take him away," explained Burnham. "They'll be here any minute? Where is the sick man?"

"I'll go down the river with them," cried the soldier.

He led them to a small log house, but would not enter. He explained:

"Wood lice mighty thick here abouts. While you're looking him over, I'll go and fetch my few belongings."

Bowing their heads, they entered through the low doorway. The sick man was on a pallet close by the small opening that served as a window. The air was almost at oven heat. At first glance the invalid resembled a wild animal more than a man. His hair and beard were long and tangled and almost concealed his emaciated face. Where the flesh showed it was red and swollen from insect bites.

"Heard the sergeant talking to you," he faintly said. "If I hadn't, I'd guessed you was a Frenchman, mister, and had brought one of your Injuns to kill me. And I wouldn't much cared."

"We are friends. Colonel Johnson is sending two Mohawks to paddle you down the river at once. We shall stay till they come," Burnham assured him.

Tears rolled down his hollow face.

"Praise God for that!" he cried. "Thought I'd been overlooked. I sent a writing to Colonel Johnson when his Injuns left me here to rest up. Since then I've been praying I might die before those —— could catch me again. I bust loose, you know. They'll never take me prisoner a second time. And, oh, mister! The cruel sights I've seen when I was being took to Montreal and some of the prisoners got played out!"

"Don't think about that," soothed Burnham. "That part is all ended. You'll start shortly. It's cool on the river and you'll be a new man by the time you reach Albany. They'll put you in the fort, high on the hill. After you're able to travel you can go home. You did Colonel Johnson a service. He never forgets. He said you were from New England."

In a stronger voice the sick man replied:

"Gorton's my name. My home is in the district of Maine. North Yarmouth."

Burnham stared through the low doorway at the river; but he only saw a small boy sitting with a dish of woad-waxen on his knees, and silently and steadily looking into the north.

After a few moments Burnham asked—

"You have kin there? In North Yarmouth?"

"My little boy," answered Gorton in a hoarse whisper, for his throat was choking and hurting him as he thought of the child.

"His name might be Reuben?"

"Oh, merciful Father! Don't go to tell me something's happened to him?" cried Gorton, coming to a sitting posture, his sunken eyes glaring, his thin fingers clawing at Burnham's fringed hunting-shirt. "Oh, my God! Your eyes tell it! Thou givest and Thou taketh away! I won't need your boatmen, mister. I'm walking back north. They'll be welcome to me now, but I'll be taking some of 'em with me. I'll—"

"Stop! stop! The boy's all right. He's waiting for you. The neighbors believe you to be dead, but he knows you'll come back," cried Burnham, at last finding his tongue.

Gorton collapsed and lay like one dead. Then his chest began rising and falling convulsively and his sobbing could be heard on the river bank. Burnham waited. The sobbing changed to silent tears, and Gingego in disgust at such weakness, stepped outside the door. Finally the man was again in control of himself. In a faint voice he pleaded:

"Let me start at once. I feel a mighty lot better. Lord, forgive me for doubting. I might a known Thou wouldst not forget me after sending me those other comforters. Seemed like angels was being neighborly when they came in and stopped for a bit. Even now I can't make out if they was real flesh and blood, or something I thought I saw."

"You are weak. You dreamed," said Burnham.

"They sang to me and cheered me mightily. They gave me a drink from a jug of rum. The little man with the broken sword almost got me to laughing at his foolery. The short, thick-set one vowed he'd protect me from all the wild Injuns Canada could send down here. The third, a handsome man and bravely dressed, washed my face with cool water and left me some money."

"It was no dream," muttered Burnham. "Gave you bills of credit on Rhode Island or this province?"

"Good land! But you jump a body most dingly, mister. It was hard money. Twenty shillings. I've got it here, but I never s'posed I'd live to use it."

And from under the blankets he fished out the coins. Burnham took them sceptically and stepped to the door and examined them. Then he softly exclaimed:

"——! But if they ain't sound, honest silver!"

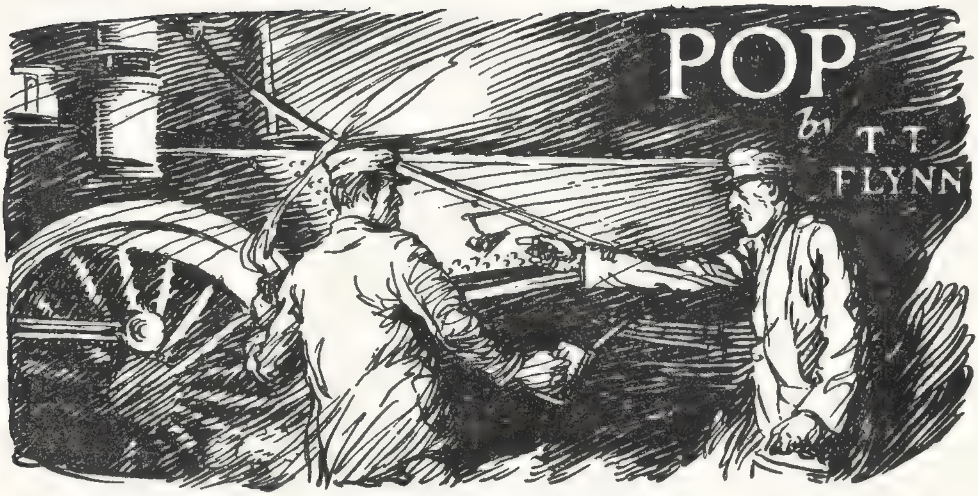
No halt was made at the wooden fort on the hill at Saratoga. Several sawmills, set up before the war but now idle or in ruins, had taken much toll of the timber in the surrounding flat country. Several families of Dutch refugees had come into the fort or had taken up hazardous quarters in near-by deserted cabins. A mile above the fort by a waterfall the travelers halted to inquire the cause of excited chattering among several men and two women.

Burnham called out a query. A man, the only one of the group speaking English gruffly replied—

"Use your own eyes."

Burnham advanced and did so. Gingego, peering over his shoulder, grunted in approval as he beheld the body of an Indian on the ground. The man had been scalped.

TO BE CONTINUED



Author of "A Matter of Judgment"

PETER HAND he was christened. "Pop" he was called—carelessly—yet with a hint of affection underneath. On the countless miles of the great D. & R. system there was no other engineer who had handled a throttle so long. A link was Pop, a link between the present and the past, a holdover from the days of the small, light, queer looking wood-burning engines to the era of the monster, self-stoking, super-heating engines of today.

He looked like something from the past. Thin he was, and dried up, till the skin stretched taut across the bones beneath. His shoulders were bowed with the weight of the years and some of the elasticity was gone from his step—but not all. He could still swing down from a cab swiftly and easily and—endearing grace—in his eyes was the perennial twinkle of youth. He was still one of the boys—good natured, fun loving, and likable.

How old he was Pop claimed he did not know. The company records gave no hint and, if the truth were known, perhaps it was a good thing. There is an age limit for even the most spry.

But, age limit or no, Pop covered his run steadily, month in and month out, year after year. He ran the fastest train on the D. & R. system—the Hill and Plain Express—from Rawlings to Mountain City. It was one of the fastest trains in the country, the pet and pride of Weegan, president of the road. And Pop handled it in a fitting manner. There was rarely a minute lost on his portion of the run, and many of them were made up.

When the Hill and Plain was late it was interesting to watch Pop. He would take his engine from the Rawlings roundhouse in good time and back it down to the station. On the station side-track he would swing down, give the machinery a final inspection and then begin a quick nervous pacing, up and down, up and down, waiting for the late train.

His manner would get more strained, and, finally he would swear softly under his breath. By the time the train whistled for Crooked River bridge, three miles down the line, he would be at fever heat. At the first sound of the wailing blast he would clamber up into the cab and sit there, like a runner on the mark, until the train pulled into the station and the other engine uncoupled. But once his monster mountain engine was coupled on, the nervous impatient manner left him and he turned into as cold and precise a piece of machinery as his engine.

He knew every foot of the road, every curve, every hill, every culvert. He knew where the pounding monster beneath him could be let out to the limit, where it needed to be checked, how best to take the grades. And he never failed to snake the Hill and Plain into Mountain City with many minutes made up. A great engineer—Pop.

He was in the way of becoming a tradition.

Men came and men passed on—but Pop went on forever—or so it seemed. But all things have an ending and even Pop realized it. He knew he couldn't handle a throttle much longer and so prepared for it.

On the anniversay of his forty-ninth year behind a throttle the boys gave Pop a dinner in the dining-room of the Rawlings House. Roy Blanton, the huge, loud-voiced, profane, square-shooting master mechanic was there. And Botts, the gloomy general foreman, and Spreckles, road foreman of engineers, and Joe Hinkle, who was second on the list—and a score of others, all old friends of two decades and more.

They greeted Pop with hearty slaps on the back and traded memories over the food and drank to the days that used to be, with brimming glasses of grape juice. In spite of the grape juice it was a right royal meal. And at the last Pop arose and flabbergasted them all by announcing that, after one more year—on the fiftieth anniversary of his first throttle job, he was going to retire.

Fifty years—what joys and sorrows, what trials and tribulations were glossed over in those words. In that time the D. & R. had risen from a little debt-ridden road to one of the finest stretches of steel in the country. In that time the men around the table, and others, had come to the railroad, most of them as young boys. They had grown up, married, raised families and entered into old age.

In that time trains had changed from light wooden coaches and uncertain engines to heavy all-steel Pullmans and huge roaring locomotives that dwarfed their predecessors in size and performance. On the railroad there had been joy, sorrow, achievement—and sometimes failure. There had been wrecks, both of trains and of people. The stage had been an unending flux of life, and Pop had been a part of it all. And now he was preparing to join the spectators on the sidelines.

THE boys gave him a cheer—and he sat down, smiling, yet a little tremulous at the thought of leaving everything. They assured him that he had many years to work yet and was foolish to talk so. But Pop shook his head and smiled at them and guessed that fifty years and more was enough for any man to work.

In the following months Pop's coming retirement filled a large part of his life. On his off days, when he ate supper at Mrs. Gilgoney's boarding-house in Rawlings, he would go out on the front porch after the meal was finished, fill his charred and blackened pipe and dream. If any of the boarders sat near him he would tell them at great length of his plans.

"Fifty years of service," he would end up, half closing his eyes and puffing gently. "Fifty-years to a day, my boy. It's a record that not many'll beat—fifty years at the throttle—what d'ye think?"

And he would take the stem of the pipe from his mouth and peer into the face of his listener with wistful eagerness. And when the listener agreed he was almost childishly pleased.

The desire to make his last run on the fiftieth anniversary of his first became an obsession. He lived with it every hour of the day and, I doubt not, dreamed of it at night.

But, three months before the day of his fiftieth anniversary, destiny stepped in. It was while the Hill and Plain was running west. She had been given to Pop six minutes late and he was trying to make up the time, with a minute or so to the good if possible.

It was between Rawlings and Dickson, before the road-bed rears up in that winding, twisting ladder which is called Twenty Mile Grade. There was little chance of gaining any time on the long grueling climb up the grade so, on the level miles that remained, Pop was driving the huge eight-wheeler to the limit. It was night and the headlight poured down the track in a dazzling beam. The serried telegraph poles moved into sight far ahead, rushed back in ghostly lines and flashed past with startling suddenness.

The engine was steaming nicely—making little effort of the task of pulling ten heavy all-steel Pullmans. The roar of their progress filled the air with a thundering cacaphony of sound—but to Pop it was the sweetest of music. His ear picked out the separate sounds instinctively. There was the jar of the left front-end brass which was not fitted neatly enough. There was a worn driving-box on the right side—the back one, he thought. The soft hiss of the piston packing, the click of the rail joints, the added note in the exhaust as the fireman turned the blower on, the intermittent sound of the air pump—all spoke their message and blended into a rhythmic cadence.

Pop sat hunched forward in his seat, his hand on the throttle, his eyes fixed far down the track. Now and then he glanced at the air gage, or the steam gage or at the water glass. Otherwise he hardly moved, except as the surge and sway of the cab jostled him on the deep seat cushion.

The lost time was fast being made up. Pop hummed a little ditty and turned over in his mind the fact that he was wiping one more run from the few that were left for him to cover. Three months and that part of his life would be a closed book. He would not have to be awake all hours of the night, or freeze in the cold winter winds, swelter in the summer heat, and be at the beck and call of his work. He would be free, unshackled, able to do as he pleased for the rest of his days.

And, as he peacefully thought upon it, there was a sudden quiver of the big engine—a lurch—a mighty battering and rending—a burst of sparks in front of the cab as steel met steel.

It was the right back side-rod. A flaw—hidden by the grease—deepened from the terrific pounding—had broken under the strain of running seventy miles an hour.

The great rod, fastened at one end to the crank pin, threshed out like a flail. It struck the ground—sheered off the ends of several ties and thrust the heavy rocking locomotive up until it was on the point of turning over. Continuing on around it smashed and beat at the engine. Sections of running-board and pipe were torn loose as if they were straws. An immense air reservoir, struck squarely, went sailing through the air and disappeared into the night. The front end of the cab crumpled like paper.

At the first sign of trouble Pop had closed the throttle and applied the air. The brakes locked and, showering streams of sparks from every shoe, the train ground to a jarring halt. The pumps, throbbing madly, echoed hollowly in the stillness of the night. Doors down the length of the train opened—a bobbing light dropped to the ground and moved forward.

Beyond the crippled engine there was little damage. The engine was still on the rails, no passengers were injured—the fireman was unhurt. But Pop slumped forward across the brake valve, his head covered with blood, the flesh opened to the bone for inches where a piece of the flying debris had struck him.

He was still living when they got him to the hospital but for days he hovered between life and death. It was touch and go, with the powers of old age and weakness pulling one way and the whole hospital staff pulling the other. He finally rallied and pulled through, but it was a narrow escape.

The head surgeon said as much to Roy Blanton, when the rough mannered, kind hearted master mechanic came to inquire about Pop's health.

"Had his head been a fraction of an inch to the right, he would have been taken to the morgue instead of the hospital," the surgeon said, and added under his breath, "and the morgue would have been the more merciful."

Blanton looked at him closely.

"What do you mean by that?" he asked.

"He'll never be able to run an engine again," the surgeon said bluntly. "He's not right in the head—never will be."

Blanton bit his lip thoughtfully.

"Isn't there any way?" he asked hopefully.

"None," said the surgeon. "His mind goes blank at times. Suppose it did that when he was entering a busy station? He'd smash right on through with the train out of control."

Blanton shook his head regretfully.

"Of course he's out, if it's that way. But Doc, —— it—I hate to see it. Does he know?"

"No," said the surgeon, "and he wont, if he is not told. After the blank periods are over he doesn't know anything has happened. Better have him retire from work. He'll live peacefully until he dies. It won't be long."

So Pop lived and returned to Mrs. Gilgoney's boarding-house. He looked much the same— a little more dried and yellow—the skin stretched a little tighter over his bones—a trifle more stooped—but the twinkle was still in his eyes and he smiled almost as often.

But, as the surgeon said, somewhere beneath the bone which had been battered so unmercifully there was a break. He acted, most of the time, like the old Pop and a person would be hard put to find a thing wrong with him. And then, suddenly, there would come a lapse and he would know nothing.

It happened at one meal at Mrs. Gilgoney's, a week or so after Pop left the hospital. He was eating a bowl of soup. Suddenly he paused and couldn't go on. The spoon was in his hand and the bowl of soup before him, but he couldn't get the key to them.

Mrs. Gilgoney noticed he wasn't eating and stopped by his chair solicitously.

"Shure—and have ye no appetite, Mr. Hand?" she asked.

"Eh?"

Pop looked up at her vacantly and brushed the back of his hand across his forehead. It was pitiful to see him trying to remember.

Mrs. Gilgoney looked at him compassionately and then turned away with a shake of her head. Pop just sat there and presently the break closed up and he continued eating, unaware that anything had happened. That was the hard part; he didn't know.

But the days passed and nothing was said about the run. One evening when Blanton stopped in to see him Pop spoke about it, carelessly, yet with an undercurrent of anxiety.

"I suppose now, the boys'll give me a send-off when I pull out on the last run?"

Blanton bit down hard on the dead cigar which was his constant companion.

Pop waited for his answer.

"Well," said Blanton, and swallowed uneasily, "I don't see why they wont."

Pop looked at him a little doubtfully, for Blanton's manner was a bit queer.

"You'll be there, too?" he questioned.

It was so easy to say no—to blast the idea with a single brusk sentence. But after one look at the pathetic eagerness which held Pop, Blanton could not. He was too bighearted—too kind beneath the roughness of his outer self. He temporized instead.

"Think you'll be strong enough to run an engine then?" he asked. "Mustn't overdo, even for sentiment, you know."

"Strong enough?" Pop flexed a wasted arm and patted his chest. "Why I'm strong enough to go runnin' regular, today. This rest has fixed me up fine."

"We'll see," Blanton muttered, "we'll see. Don't want to risk hurting you."

He arose and made his escape before Pop could ask any more embarrassing questions.

Blanton told his troubles to Spreckles, the road foreman of engineers, who really had the task of assigning Pop to the run.

"You'll have to tell him, Spreckles," he said, chewing savagely on the stump of his cigar. "I haven't got the heart."

"Ay," said Spreckles moodily, "you'd leave the dirty work for me to do."

"Ha! Well it's your work, isn't it?"

And Spreckles had nothing to say to that.

But, like Blanton, Spreckles had no taste for the job and put it off, hoping that something would turn up.

* * *

NO SOLUTION turned up—but Pop did, several days later. It lacked only three days of his anniversary night and he was worried, for nothing had been said about the run. It was in Spreckles' office that he appeared—as little and dried up as ever, but with the good nature plainly shaded by worry.

Blanton was in Spreckles' office at the time and he greeted Pop with a hearty handshake.

"By the ——, it's good to see you out again, Pop," he said heartily. "You look as well as ever."

And then he remembered and sent an uneasy glance at Spreckles to see if that man had fulfilled his duties. Spreckles' face told the tale, right enough.

Pop came to the matter at once.

"I thought I'd drop around and sign up for the run next Thursday," he said, eyeing Spreckles.

There was a silence in the grimy, cramped office. Blanton looked at Spreckles accusingly. Spreckles looked wretched. Pop looked uneasy. Things weren't as they usually were and he sensed it vaguely.

"Well," said Pop uncertainly. "I—I guess I'll go in an' see the register checker an' then be on my way."

The situation was getting worse all the time so Spreckles took his courage in his hand and approched the matter diplomatically.

"Now, Pop," he said, "what d'you want to risk putting yourself back in bed for? You're getting along all right now. Better leave well enough alone."

"What d'ye mean?" asked Pop.

"Well," said Spreckles, "maybe it wouldn't be the best thing for you—going out on an engine like that—so soon. It's a bad strain, you know."

"Strain?" said Pop, a trifle irritably. "What d'ye mean strain? Haven't I gone almost fifty years and stood it all right?"

"Yes," said Spreckles. "But—"

"No but about it," said Pop. "I'm as good as I ever was, ain't I?"

"Well—you look as good to me; but you can't ever tell. I wouldn't have you do a thing that would hurt you," said Spreckles.

"My run won't hurt me," said Pop positively. "It's all right then—ain't it?"

Spreckles looked at the floor and then at Blanton for help—but Blanton was turned away, reading some ancient form letters that were tacked on the wall.

There was no help for it. Spreckles had to do his duty, no matter what the cost. He swallowed and then shook his head slowly.

"I'm afraid you better hadn't, Pop," he said. "I think the best thing for you to do is go on the list and forget all about the railroad. You had a cruel accident and you'd best stop before another one takes you off."

Pop flared up at that.

"Who asked you what you thought," he snapped. "I told you I want to take the Hill and Plain out next Thursday."

"Well—you can't," said Spreckles bluntly. "You're in no condition and I won't let you. That's final."

Pop gave one glance at the set of Spreckles' jaw and realized that it was final. He seemed to sag—all the life went from him and he became just a weak old man—on the down grade and going fast from this life. He looked it in that minute. I guess the only thing that had been keeping Pop going all the years was the railroad—and with that gone, and the last great disappointment stuffed down his throat, it was too much. He was left a husk of a human—with the life sapped out.

He didn't say a word—just looked at Spreckles dumbly—looked at him and at Blanton's back, and then turned and walked from the office.

When the door closed behind him, Spreckles swore a great oath.

"I had to do it," he said almost tearfully to Blanton. "There wasn't a thing I could do, now was there?"

"Not a thing," said Blanton, swinging around heavily. "You had to do it, Spreckles. What gets me," he added, "is that Pop don't understand yet. He thinks we are doing it out of the meanness of our nature and ——! there's nothing we can do to change it."

What Pop really did think, no one knew. He went back to Mrs. Gilgoney's boarding house, slowly, dragging, like some shade creeping back to the hinterland of life. He sat down heavily on one of the chairs on the front porch and rested his head in his hands.

He was still sitting there when Mrs. Gilgoney called him for dinner. Pop did not answer her and presently she came to the front door, thinking he was asleep.

"Shure now, Mr. Hand," she called from the door, "the food's all on the table. An' it's the kind you like—ham an' cabbage, an' lemon pie an' all."

Pop looked around at her and rubbed his head in a bewildered manner. Finally he shook his head.

"Guess I wont eat today," he said. "I don't feel just up to standard. Got a headache."

Mrs. Gilgoney tried again but Pop was firm, and at last she left him. He sat on the porch all afternoon, silent, still, with now and then a bewildered brushing at his forehead. He did eat supper though and Mrs. Gilgoney thought everything was all right.

Thursday came—Pop's day of days. It rained. All day the rain fell in steady sheets. The ground turned into a sea of mud—the landscape became a gray, misty picture, crisscrossed with slanting lines of water.

Pop spent the day in Mrs. Gilgoney's parlor. He sat there, saying nothing, doing nothing, his chin slumped forward on his chest, gazing down into space. He ate his meals and returned to his chair, in silence.

After supper Mrs. Gilgoney and several of the boarders came into the parlor also. One of the company started the phonograph. To the people, the music or the conversation Pop paid not the slightest attention.

About nine o'clock there was a slight lull in the steady downpour. Pop stirred restlessly and suddenly straightened up in his chair. He cocked his head to one side as if he were listening to something. After a moment he nodded and drew out his watch. He pursed his lips at the time, replaced the watch and arose from his chair.

Mrs. Gilgoney looked across the room at him.

"What is it, Mr. Hand?" she asked. "Is there somethin' I can do for you?"

"Do?" said Pop. "Why yes. You can get me my lunch pail. It's getting pretty late."

"L-lunch pail?" stammered Mrs. Gilgoney. "You asked for no lunch pail. What are ye needin' a lunch pail for?"

"For my run, of course," Pop replied. "Did you ever hear of me going out on my run without my lunch pail?"

Mrs. Gilgoney breathed heavily and asked—

"What run is it you are going out on?"

"My last one," said Pop. "Didn't I tell you? Tonight's my fiftieth anniversary. I'm goin' to retire tomorrow. Tonight I'm takin' the Hill and Plain out for the last time."

Mrs. Gilgoney stared at Pop and her lips worked soundlessly. She knew his mind was failing—she knew there was never another run for him in this life. But Pop faced her calmly and smiled. When she made no move he drew forth his watch again.

"It's getting late," he said kindly. "'Tis best you hurry up, Mrs. Gilgoney. 'Twouldn't do to make the Hill an' Plain late tonight, would it? Not on my last run."

Mrs. Gilgoney shook her head pityingly. But she was a kindly soul and, thinking to humor the old man, she went into the kitchen and found his old lunch box and filled it with some sandwiches and an apple. There was some coffee left in the pot and she put that in his thermos bottle.

When she returned to the parlor Pop was ready to go out. He was dressed, as he had dressed for many another rainy night, in his worn raincoat and hat and over his shoes, a pair of deep rubbers. A bulge in the left side of the rain coat marked the bundle of overalls under his arm.

Pop took the lunch kit with a word of thanks, said good-night to Mrs. Gilgoney and the boarders in the room and let himself out the front door. They could feel the slight jar of the front steps as he picked his way down.

Mrs. Gilgoney looked through the window at the streaming night and clasped her hands in distress.

"The poor man," she said. "He should be stopped. He'll get lost and catch his death of cold."

But no one moved to stop Pop, and in another minute he was gone.

Roy Blanton had returned to the roundhouse that evening to finish some reports for the superintendent. They were stacked neatly in the wire tray at one side of his desk and he was having a last smoke with Kent, the night roundhouse foreman. A slight lull in the rain had passed and outside it drummed down steadily.

The door in the end of the hall, which bisected the roundhouse office building, opened and shut. Shuffling steps approached and, in another minute, framed in the doorway, glistening with water, a puddle forming at his feet as he stood, was Pop.

A half smile on his countenance, he faced Blanton and Kent, the battered lunch kit in one hand, the bulge of his overalls showing beneath his raincoat—the same in every detail as the Pop of old who stopped in for a greeting before his night's work.

And as of old Pop nodded and said quietly—

"Howdy, boys."

Blanton took the cigar from his mouth, looked at the lunch kit in astonishment and said—

"Howdy, Pop."

Pop knocked his hat against the edge of the door, sprinking the floor liberally with water by the act.

"It's a bad night out," he said. "Have you heard how the Hill and Plain is running, Roy?"

"Late," said Blanton mechanically. "She left Clinton ten minutes late."

Pop clucked in annoyance.

"Hope she don't lose any more time," he said. "I'd like to bring her in on time tonight. It wouldn't be fitting to come in late on my last run, would it?"

"Last run?" echoed Blanton. "What do you mean?"

Pop looked his astonishment in turn.

"What do I mean? My last run, of course. Do you not mind that this is my last night on the D. & R.? 'Tis my fiftieth anniversary. I thought you would remember that, Roy."

"Of course," Blanton muttered. "I was only joking, Pop."

He looked at Kent uneasily. It had not occurred to him at first that Pop, in his weakness, had overlooked the fact that he was out—but all was clear—and it was a mess that he little liked.

Pop, turning to go, asked over his shoulder—

"Seen my fireman yet?"

"He's here," said Blanton.

Satisfied, Pop went on back to the locker room to change into his overalls.

When he was gone Blanton sat up and looked at Kent with dismay.

"Here's the —— to pay," he said. "Pop's slipped a screw somewhere. He thinks he's going to take the Hill and Plain out, and there's not a chance in the world for him to do it. We'll have to stop him—and it's going to be a dirty job. Little liking have I for it."

Kent tossed his cigaret into the ash tray.

"Henderson's running tonight," he said. "He and his fireman went out to their engine a couple of minutes ago. I saw 'em pass the window. I'll go out and tell Henderson to run down to the station and do his oiling there. We'll give Pop some sort of excuse. Perhaps by tomorrow it will all be out of his mind." He jumped to his feet and hastened out of the office.

Rain—sodden rain—and a little, short, weak-minded old man—but was it the weak mind or another power working through the failing brain? Strange things occasionally occur.

Pop donned his worn, faded overalls, tucked his gauntlet gloves in his pocket, slipped into the rain-coat again and went out to the oil-house.

"SHORTY" BROWN, in charge of the oil-house, peered at Pop uncertainly when he presented himself at the window.

"What is it, Pop?" he asked.

"My oil can," said Pop, "an' some waste. Do you not know your job?"

"What run?" asked Shorty.

"The Hill and Plain," said Pop, suddenly peevish. "Where's your head? Have I ever run another?"

"Henderson's drawed oil and waste for the Hill an' Plain," Shorty said impersonally. "I can't let you have any more."

Pop frowned.

"Now what the ——," he said, "does Henderson want with the Hill an' Plain? Is he off his head? Tonight is my night."

"That I couldn't say," returned Shorty. "But he got ready for it. I saw him and his fireman go out to the engine ten minutes ago."

"I'll see about that," Pop snapped, and he turned away from the window and stamped off in the rain. But he didn't go in the office to see Blanton about it. He went out on the ready yard, looking for the engine and Henderson.

He was too late. Kent had spoken to Henderson and the big mountain engine which pulled the express was on the way to the station.

It didn't take Pop long to see that it was gone. He stopped at the switchman's shanty at the lower end of the yard and verified it.

The switchman nodded.

"The Hill and Plain's engine went out four minutes ago," he said. "It was the 5856."

No mistake about that. The 5856 was the regular engine. Pop stood in the downpour and knit his brow in perplexed thought. Finally, shaking his head, but with his single idea uppermost, he set out for the station.

And while Blanton and Kent waited for him to appear, and congratulated themselves that at least the engine was out of the way, Pop plodded on through the rain toward the station.

The Hill and Plain had lost time steadily between Clinton and Rawlings. It left Clinton ten minutes late and before half the distance to Rawlings was covered a driver-spring hanger on the engine broke and the great spring fell out of its saddle. It landed beneath the engine and its mad gyrations stripped the tank brake rigging off. By the time the long train was halted, the broken rigging removed and the hanging parts tied up, the Hill and Plain was twenty-four minutes late.

It was a long walk to the station. And for Pop, weakened, old, cumbered with his heavy rain-coat, plodding, stumbling through the darkness, it was even longer. But he went steadily forward and at last the platform lights shone through the darkness and the pouring rain. The Hill and Plain had just pulled in, twenty minutes late. Her engine, cut loose from the train and on the way to the roundhouse, passed Pop as he trudged into the station limits.

The 5856 was coupled to the Hill and Plain. Her headlight gleamed like a great eye as Pop came up through the night. To some, the glaring light would have appeared menacing, a warning of the thundering danger that lay behind it—but to Pop it was a friendly beacon, an eye of comfort in a sea of trouble. He quickened his steps, walked into the dazzling rays, reached the engine and passed into blackness once more as he walked out of the headlight beam into the darkness beside the engine.

Pop stopped for a minute to accustom his eyes to the darkness once more. And when the orange-red stars and moons had passed from his vision and he looked forth clearly he saw—Henderson.

Henderson was standing by the main brass, a smoking oil-torch in one hand and a long spout oil-can in the other. He was finishing the oiling that he should have done on the ready lot, the oiling that Pop's appearance at the roundhouse had prevented. Henderson's back was to Pop and he was unaware of his presence.

For perhaps twenty seconds Pop stood in his tracks by the cylinder head and watched Henderson tilt oil from his long spout oil-can into the main box, and on the main brass and knuckle pin. He rubbed his head in a bewildered manner—and suddenly his jaws set in a tight line and he stumped forward.

"What the —— are you doing with my engine and my run?" he demanded.

Henderson swung around, held up his torch, the better to see, and stared at Pop as though he was seeing a ghost. Kent had told him of Pop, told him how things were, and said that they would keep Pop busy at the roundhouse until the Hill and Plain pulled out. Something had slipped somewhere—and Henderson didn't know just where or how. He was a good engineer—but not too strong in his reasoning powers. So he shifted uneasily and finally said—

"I brought her down to the station."

"Yes," said Pop irritably, "and made me walk all the way down here through the rain."

Henderson said nothing and Pop snapped—

"Is she oiled up?"

"Yes."

Pop drew forth his watch.

"Twenty-five minutes late," he said with vexation. "And my last run." He thrust the watch back into his pocket and said sharply, "Let me have the oil-can. I want to put a little more oil on the pistons and the crosshead!"

"No," said Henderson heavily, "I can't do that."

"Can't?" Pop's face darkened with anger. "Why can't you?"

"I can't," said Henderson stubbornly.

"My train's twenty-five minutes late now!" said Pop furiously. "And on my last run—and you're delaying me! Give me that can!"

"No!" said Henderson.

Pop acted quickly. Henderson's spanner was laying on the main rod by them. Pop grabbed it and swung. Henderson threw up his arm, but the torch glare, Pop's quickness and Henderson's utter surprize made the gesture futile. True, the spanner did strike Henderson's arm—but it glanced and caught his temple also. Henderson, stunned, dropped in his tracks. His torch flew from his nerveless fingers, bounced, rolled and the flame fizzed into nothing in a puddle of water.

The engine was some distance beyond the last of the platform lights, in total darkness, and so they were unnoticed. Pop picked up the oil-can, muttering to himself and, going to the crosshead, flicked some oil on the guides, the wrist pin and the piston. He went around to the other side, repeated his actions, walked to the cab steps and clambered up into the cab.

Kelly, who had fired for Pop for five years, was adjusting the lubricator and, with his head thrust up into the top of the cab, did not notice Pop when he appeared. Pop went to the engineer's seat and threw back the lid. Henderson's lunch box was in the bottom of the seat box but he paid no attention to it. He dropped his own lunch box in, stripped off his rain-coat, folded it up and thrust it in the box. Taking his goggles from his pocket he hung them around his neck.

The conductor had already compared his watch with Henderson and handed over the orders. The tinted tissue-paper sheet was tucked beneath the handle of the brake valve. Pop unfolded it and read approvingly. They were late—but everything was clear into Dickson, eighty miles away.

Pop had just finished reading the orders when Kelly dropped to the deck and looked around. Pop nodded and said—

"Howdy, Kelly."

Kelly stood rooted to the spot. Like Henderson, he looked as though he had seen a ghost. And while Kelly stared speechless, Pop left his seat, opened the firebox door, stooped and examined the fire and the crown sheet. He shook his head at the fire.

"You're carrying her a little too heavy, tonight, Kelly," he said. "We've much time to make up."

Kelly's lips worked and he finally asked—

"Where's Henderson?"

"Henderson?" said Pop absently. "How should I know where Henderson is?"

He looked at the steam, tried the water, looked at the air pressures, sat down on his seat again and pulled out his watch.

"Twenty-eight minutes," he said with vexation. "I wonder what's holding them up, back there."

"Henderson?" again said Kelly—but Pop paid no attention to him.

Kelly went to the gangway and looked out into the night. But through the blackness and the pouring rain he saw nothing of Henderson. And while he was still looking the signal whistle piped out—and Pop, looking back down the length of the train, caught the conductor's high ball.

Pop threw the brake handle over—pushed the air reverse into forward motion—and, when the brakes released, opened the sanders and pulled out on the throttle.

The 5856 started, took up the slack in the long heavy train and slowly moved forward into the darkness and the storm. Pop gave her more steam—and the staccato blast of the exhaust beat back through the night like a Brobdingnagian trip hammer as they gathered speed.

LATE—twenty-eight minutes late—and Pop at the throttle for the last time. The blast from the squat stack shortened and the tempo increased as Pop cut the valves back. Like a snarling monster the train left Rawlings and plunged off into the darkness. The headlight seared around the curve, half a mile below the station, the chime whistle screamed, and the Hill and Plain was swallowed by the night.

Five minutes after the Hill and Plain had disappeared the beating rain brought Henderson back to consciousness. He sat up groggily and held his aching head in his hands. Memory slowly returned and he realized where he was and why. He started to his feet wildly and looked about. The track beside him was empty—there was no life of any sort visible in the sickly rays of the platform lights.

Henderson ran to the station and burst through the door. To the agent he cried hoarsely—

"The Hill and Plain—where is she?"

"Gone," said the agent as he jumped to his feet. "Didn't you take her out?"

Henderson did not reply. He plunged to the station phone, jerked the receiver off the hook and shouted:

"Give me the roundhouse! Give me the foreman's office!"

Blanton and Kent were still in the office. They had waited for Pop to return—and when he had not shown up they had concluded that he had wandered back to Mrs. Gilgoney's boarding-house. After the Hill and Plain whistled for the curve Blanton donned his raincoat preparatory to going home through the storm to his comfortable bed.

Suddenly the phone rang.

Kent reached over and carelessly lifted the receiver. He spoke into the mouthpiece, listened for a moment, started and his face paled.

"Wait!" he called into the phone, and thrust the thing at Blanton. "Get this!" he said agitatedly. "It's Henderson talking. He's calling from the station. Trying to say something about Pop and the Hill and Plain."

Blanton jumped for the phone. In rigid silence he listened while Henderson babbled his story. Finally he put the receiver back on the hook and set the phone down on the desk. His face, when he looked at Kent, was drawn.

"God!" he choked. "Pop knocked Henderson out with a spanner—and is running the Hill and Plain!"

Kent gnawed at his lip.

"We should have collared him when he was here," he said.

Blanton threw his hat across the room.

"Never mind what we should have done," he said grimly. "It's what we shall do now that's worrying me." He jerked the phone off the desk again and called the engine dispatcher.

While Blanton was burning the wires Pop was burning the rails with the Hill and Plain. As they left the station Kelly almost moved to pull him off the seat and stop the train. Kelly didn't quite understand things. There was a bare chance that Pop might have obtained permission to make the run. And he seemed to be all right. He handled the throttle with as much skill as of old, looked rational, and gave nothing concrete to worry about. So Kelly finally fell to his fire, keeping a watchful eye upon Pop and Pop's part of the engine as he worked.

As the heavy train gathered speed the

needle on the speed indicator crept around the dial. It reached the mark of their normal running speed—and moved on. Kelly, halting his labors for a moment, looked at it in fascination. And then he looked at Pop. But Pop didn't see him. The cab windows were closed against the rain—which their speed turned into a howling, raging gale. Pop was leaning forward, his eyes glued on the little square of the clear vision window, his hand draped across the throttle—with an expression of pure bliss on his wrinkled old face. On his last ride the ghosts of fifty years rode with Pop—and he was content.

Faster he drove the huge engine—and still faster. The pounding of the great driving rods rose to a frenzied blurr as they roared forward through the night. The needle on the speed indicator crept over still farther. The engine began to rock and sway alarmingly and, as they slewed around a sharp curve, Kelly, in the act of tossing a shovel of coal lost his feet and piled across the cab in a tangle of shovel, coal, arms and legs.

Kelly got to his feet cursing and looked at the speed indicator. The needle quivered at a mark it had never reached in the five years Kelly had fired the Hill and Plain. His face worked and he grabbed Pop's arm.

"Say!" he screamed. "What you trying to do? You'll run us off in the ditch!"

Pop shook his arm free and glared at Kelly through the dim light of the cab.

"Get to your work!" he shouted above the crash of their progress. "D'you want to lose your steam?"

Kelly got. There was something in Pop's exalted air—something in the authority with which he spoke that brooked no other course. He did not know that it was Pop and fifty years that spoke—but he sensed enough to make him obey.

And while Kelly doggedly kept the steam at two hundred pounds Pop kept the Hill and Plain at her mad pace. He cut the valves clear back on the level stretches, eased her up the hills and nursed her as she fled along the down grades. Every few minutes he drew forth his watch—and his smile of content became deeper as the lost minutes were regained.

In the Rawlings roundhouse the first tension had eased somewhat. The dispatcher had assured Blanton that Pop had a clear run into Dickson. With that to reassure him Blanton reached into his pockets for a cigar. He chopped the end off with one nervous bite, lighted it and puffed deeply. Soothed by the smoke his thoughts once more began to work logically.

He strode up and down the office and voiced them to Kent.

"If Kelly wasn't on the engine Pop won't get very far until his steam gives out. And if Kelly is on the engine Pop must be acting all right or Kelly wouldn't have let him start the train. And if they get out on the road and Pop acts funny Kelly'll handle him—for he knows how things are with Pop. You told him and Henderson didn't you?"

Kent nodded.

As Blanton calmed down he took a more tolerant view of the situation.

"Fifty years," he said with a shake of his head. "A man can't run that long without getting it into his very soul. It's Pop's life—this last run—and I don't much blame him. If nothing happens I'll almost be glad he did it."

He leaned against the edge of his desk and thought deeply. Kent, content to let well enough alone, said nothing. Blanton spoke at last, half to himself. "The dispatcher said he could throw a red on Pop at Clearwater, ten miles this side of Dickson. I wonder—" He looked at Kent. "Where is Spreckles tonight?"

"At Dickson, I think," said Kent. "He rode a freight down there the first part of the evening."

Blanton picked up the phone again and called Dickson. Kent was right. Spreckles was at the Dickson roundhouse. For some minutes he and Blanton talked together and, when Spreckles rang off, Blanton called the dispatcher again. He was almost smiling when he hung up.

"There are two signals at Clearwater," he said. "They are going to throw the first one, yellow, on Pop. If he slows down, instead of stopping him with the other, they're going to let him go on into Dickson. Spreckles will handle him there." He looked at Kent and his gruff manner fell away and he let his inner feelings show for a moment.

"After all," he said, "fifty years are fifty years and ——! Pop has got something coming to him."

They threw the yellow on Pop at Clearwater. The Hill and Plain came plunging out of the night—a terrible thing of steel—

of lights—of flying machinery—of vomiting sparks and ear-splitting noise. Kelly, swaying on his fireman's seat box, saw the yellow eye wink out far down the track. And he looked fearfully across the cab at Pop, ready to spring at the first sign of an unnatural action. But Pop saw. The throttle swung in—his hand eased the handle of the brake valve over. He checked—checked again—and the needle of the speed indicator dropped back and back.

Kelly relaxed on his seat with a little sigh of relief.

When, a few minutes later, the Dickson station lights appeared, Pop again slowed—and they made a perfect stop by the station. Spreckles was there—and when Kelly saw him he sprang from the cab to the ground.

"Mr. Spreckles," he said excitedly, "There's something funny coming off. Where's Henderson?"

"In Rawlings," said Spreckles. "I'm going to ride the cab on into Mountain City." And again Kelly sighed with relief—for with Spreckles in the cab everything was all right. Spreckles was their superior and everything was up to him from that moment.

There was no passenger traffic for the Hill and Plain at Dickson. She stopped there only to get a helper for the long haul over Twenty Mile Grade. The helper coupled on with a little jar and Spreckles swung up into the cab.

"Hello Pop," he said casually.

"Hello John," said Pop with a grin. "It's a bad night."

"Yes," agreed Spreckles, and he added, "I think I'll ride on into Mountain City with you."

Pop nodded. Many times before Spreckles had ridden in his cab and it was perfectly natural that he would do so again.

"Fine," Pop said. "It's glad I am to have you, tonight. It's my last run, John—and fitting that you should make it with me. Maybe that's why you're doing it?"

"Yes, that's why I'm doing it," said Spreckles, and he coughed and looked out into the night uneasily.

Pop looked pleased and then pulled out his watch. He shook his head.

"We're late, John—but not near as late as we were in Rawlings. I think I'm going to make Mountain City on time, John."

Spreckles nodded.

"Of course you are, Pop," he said gruffly.

Once more the signal whistle shrilled, the conductor waved his lantern and the Hill and Plain moved off into the night. With Spreckles at his elbow Pop drove her, up the winding, rearing grade, through Sky Pass at the top of the grade and on into Mountain City.

There were times, after they passed through Sky Pass, when Spreckles almost reached out and cautioned Pop to go slower. But Spreckles was an old engineer—and he knew there was none better than Pop when he was thinking straight. And so Spreckles stayed his hand—and Pop spotted the Hill and Plain in the Union Station at Mountain City thirty seconds ahead of time.

Pop stopped her—put his air reverse in center—drew out his watch, looked at the time—and took a deep breath. "On time," he said huskily. "Fifty years, John, and I brought her in on time." He rubbed his forehead with the motion that was characteristic of him after he came out of the hospital, and spoke falteringly to Kelly. "You take her to the roundhouse, Kelly. I don't feel so good. I—I think I'll ride the cushions back to Rawlings. You'll fix it, Spreckles?"

Spreckles nodded.

"Ay, Pop, I'll fix it," he promised, and pulled out his handkerchief and blew his nose vigorously.

Spreckles did fix it—and he and Blanton fixed everything—so nothing ever came of Pop's arbitrary action.

Pop went on the list—and he follows the sun around Mrs. Gilgoney's boarding-house and talks to the people who visit him—talks of his fifty years of running, and his last ride, the ride when he made up twenty-eight minutes and brought his train in on time.

"Fifty years of service," he says, half closing his eyes and puffing gently at his pipe. "Fifty years to a day—and made up twenty-eight minutes on me last run. 'Tis a record that not many'll beat—what d'ye think?" And he takes the stem of his pipe from his mouth and peers into the faces of his visitors with wistful eagerness. And when they agree he nods and is almost childishly pleased.

"Fifty years," he says placidly. "And made up twenty-eight minutes on me last run. No, not many'll beat it."

"LOCKS" AND "COGLE"

by Arthur Woodward

WHEN the American forces invaded Mexico in 1846, of all the men in the volunteer forces from Tennessee and Kentucky none was more notorious for his pranks, ranging from practical jokes to downright bits of thievery, than "Locks" and "Cogle."

Private Cogle, ancestry uncertain, confined his escapades to the Kentucky Regiment of Cavalry while Private Locks made life entertaining for the fun loving members of the Tennessee Regiment.

Did some one lose a bridle among the Kentuckians, then Cogle was blamed and hunted for the theft. But Cogle, sly chap, was never around when he was wanted. At Washington, Arkansas, where the Kentucky regiment camped, the colonel was presented with a bill by one of the citizens of the town, a bill for some chickens, butter and eggs, purchased in the colonel's name by his servant Cogle. The colonel paid, but never found the ever elusive Cogle.

At Port Lavacca, Mexico, a goat belonging to a Frenchman, a resident of the town, was slain by the mischievous Cogle. As usual a camp-mate informed the irate owner who had perpetrated the outrage and was rewarded with a brimming cup of brandy and many profuse thanks.

Straight to the colonel went the angry Frenchman. A search was immediately instituted by the provost-marshal but Cogle it appeared had "just left camp." The Frenchman left the tents with the name "Cogle" ringing in his ears.

Shortly after this incident occurred, the Kentuckians moved from their camp to a spot five miles farther away, and their old quarters were occupied by a detachment of Tennesseeans under Lieutenant Anderson.

Salt pork becoming monotonous to the newcomers, some of them went foraging with the result that a fat yearling bull belonging to the French rancher went the way of the goat killed by Cogle of the Kentucky regiment.

Mr. Frenchman smelled a rat, as it were, and, on snooping around camp, found the unskinned legs and hoofs of his erstwhile bull. Fairly dancing with rage he went to Lieutenant Anderson and demanded satisfaction.

The lieutenant knew the bull had been shot, in fact he had dined on a portion of the meat, and in order to soothe the rancher, offered a good price for the dead beast. But no, money would not alone cover the loss of the "leetle plack pull."

"No, no," said the Frenchman, "I shall have no pay. I vants no pay for y leetlem plack pull. I vants satisfaction. I vant heem who keel my plack pull to be punish. I vants satisfaction. Who keel my pull?"

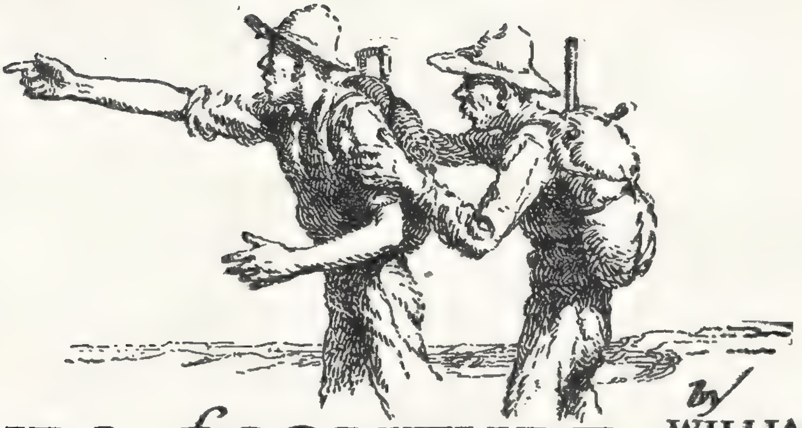
Lieutenant Anderson had heard of the notorious Cogle in the Kentucky regiment and the equally famous Locks in his own body of troopers and decided that it might be best, under the circumstances, to lay the blame on Cogle, never once suspecting that the Frenchman had heard of that roguish gentleman. He was soon undeceived.

"Why, I believe, sir," said the lieutenant gravely, "some of the men were saying that one of those rascally Kentuckians by the name of Cogle was the one who shot your bull."

The little Frenchman exploded. He threw his hands in the air and shouted:

"Cogles? —— Cogles, I knows heem before; he keel my goat."

Needless to say, the names "Cogle" and "Locks" never appeared on the payrolls. For that matter supply sergeants of the present day army never appear to have a supply of "reveille oil" on hand, nor can the poor perspiring rookies ever find the "key to the parade ground" however hard they look, and as for obtaining a "yard of skirmish line," it simply can't be had at any price—and Locks and Cogle, veterans of the Mexican War, have probably to date never been discharged from the Army.



SANDS *of* SOLITUDE

by WILLIAM WESTRUP

Author of "The Pool of Execution," "Black Magic," etc.

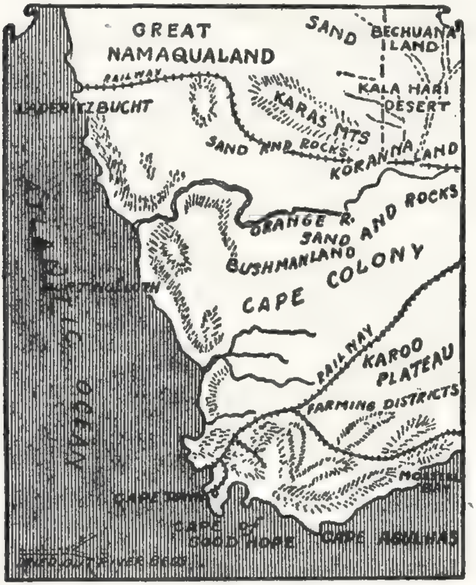
WEST of the southern portion of Africa, stretching from Cape Colony on the south to Portuguese territory on the north, lies that abomination of desolation that was formerly German South-West and is now known as the Mandated Territory. For the most part it is just sand and rock, extending right from the restless border of the sea; but mixed with those blinding, ever shifting sands, diamonds have been discovered in considerable quantities, so—

The Upington-Windhuk railway is a thread of civilization in a land for the most part utterly sterile and desolate. Once you have trekked a few miles, either north or south, it is as if God has smitten the world so that it has shriveled up and died, leaving nought but heartbreaking solitude behind. Sand on every hand, from horizon to horizon, in level, dazzling expanses, and rounded dunes, and queer, wind-fashioned ridges. Outcrops of rock here and there, black and forbidding, giving back throughout the day, blow for blow, the searing heat of the ferocious sun above them. Tracts of stony ground, littered with pebbles, fragments of blasted rock, a few bones. Of vegetation there is for the most part none, save a rare cactus, bulbous, thorn-decked and hideous; or perhaps a little rank, reed-like grass in some favored hollow.

Toiling purposefully through this abomination of sterility were two white men and a mongrel guide. Joe Macdonald, leathery, dried out and full of years, and young Bob Duncan, son of an old-time partner long married and settled down. The guide didn't count. He was a hybrid Bushman, half Korhanna, and the rest even more impossible, who had been induced to accompany the expedition for a small wage and the promise of unlimited rum when they returned.

Of course the lure was diamonds. Old Man Duncan had had the story years ago from a Dutchman who lived in Namaqualand, before Kimberley was discovered. The Dutchman in turn had it from a Bushman who practised magic, and always carried two or three glass-like stones in his little *muti* bag. Knowing nothing of diamonds the Dutchman thought nothing of this, but he happened to mention it to Duncan—Many, many years later Duncan fell upon evil days, and was like to lose the little farm that meant so much to him. It was then that young Bob got talking with Joe Macdonald.

"Yes, that's right enough," Joe admitted. "I tried it with your dad, before diamonds were really discovered in South-West. We went from this side, trekking across to Upington—no railways that way then, Bob—and on down the Orange River. Man, but that was a trek to remember! Places you can't get near the river for swamps, and other times she runs through great rocky gaps, with sides sheer up for hundreds o' feet. But we'd got good guides, and we stuck it till we got to the Richtersberg, and then turned north. We was in German territory, and it was a German police patrol that found us just in time, for we'd been a day and a half without water, and in that heat I reckon two days would be too much. Mind you, I know where we went wrong, and so does your dad. We had to follow the dried-out bed of an old river, and where it forked our Hottentot guides made their mistake. It was like this:"



He smoothed the dust by the roadside—this was in civilized Cape Colony—and sketched a route that conveyed nothing whatever to young Bob.

"As I told you," he went on, "that was before di'monds was really found in South-West, or maybe we'd have turned back and had another try. But the terrible silence, and the dryness and the sort of angriness of the country fair gets you. According to the story the old Bushman told, we reckoned we had a nine days' trip up the old bed of the Klein Mariep River, and we'd done four when we went wrong. We ain't never had another try, though I don't know just why. Somehow it scares you.

"Then there was Zwart de Villiers, only eight years back. We told him the story because he knew the country. There had been wonderful rains in the desert that year, the first for seven years, and let me tell you when it does rain there the whole blinkin' wilderness gets like a garden. Fact! I've seen it. So old Zwart sets out, thinking it would be easy, but—he never come back. We ain't talked about it since."

But Bob talked about it. He was young, and the unknown and mysterious beckoned. Moreover there was the undoubted fact that unless he made a good deal of money very soon, his father would lose his farm. All of which he pointed out to Joe Macdonald at considerable length. Finally, knowing perfectly well that Joe hesitated solely on account of his persecutor's youth, he accused the old man of being afraid to risk the expedition.

Of course that put the fat in the fire. There were endless arguments with old Duncan, and objections and bitter tears from Mrs. Duncan, but in the end the diamonds won. Old Joe and young Bob set out together, by no means so ill-matched a pair as they appeared.

Their chief trouble was the Bushman guide. True to his type he was mean-souled, lying, treacherous and lazy, and the untiring determination of the two white men was an unpleasant revelation to him. They knew him for what he was, and saw to it that he did not shirk. For the rest, he was essential to them, for he knew the desert as only he and his kind can know it, knew where to find unaccountable pools of water among the rocks, knew where grew the queer little desert melons that might save a man's life. But they had to watch him.

FOR three days they had been traveling up the dried bed of the Klein Mariep River, traveling doggedly and steadily through the stupefying heat, and bearing on their backs all the provisions and water for the expedition. Little enough of the former, for all they brought was flour, tea and a supply of sun-dried meat cut into strips; but the water was a more difficult problem. Each had a big goatskin full of the precious fluid, and the Bushman bore two more skins. It would last them—nicely calculated—till they reached their objective. According to the story they should find water there; if they didn't—well, there was no reprieve.

Beyond this they had a prospector's shovel and a Winchester rifle. Game, particularly the beautiful gemsbok, is not unknown in the desert, and there was always the chance that luck would favor them. Apart from that, they might encounter a few wandering Korhannas, friendly and subdued, but—sometimes a rifle made all the difference.

Their Bushman guide nursed a grievance. On the second day out he had tired of the business, and had expressed his intention of returning then and there. Finally he had become abusive and threatening. Whereupon Joe had kicked him methodically and thoroughly, and had explained with grim simplicity just what would happen if he tried to bolt. And since then they had watched him unceasingly, even taking it in turns to keep awake at night, lest he should try to slip away under cover of darkness. So, hating them as only a Bushman can hate, he still went on; but though he made an outward show of accepting the position, he was merely biding his time. To him the white men were the veriest children in these solitudes, but the secrets of the desert were all known to him. He could afford to wait.

At noon on the fifth day they reached a spot where they had expected to find water. There was no doubt of their having found the right place, for the water-hole was there plainly enough, in the middle of a jumble of rocks. It had originally been dug out by nomadic Bushmen, and the hooves of thirsting desert animals had scoured it deeper and ever deeper; but now the tracks at its edge were old, drifted over with sand. With their little prospector's shovel they labored for an hour, digging down below all indications of previous effort, but no sign of water rewarded them. The sand still came up dry and dusty, and when they paused from sheer exhaustion, no welcome hint of dampness showed at the bottom of the hole.

"It is as I told you, *baas*," the Bushman said eagerly. "Never has been known such dryness as these two years. Even the little sand-melons wither and die, and the big cactus shrivels. The Big Spirit frowns, and it is truly time that we returned."

Joe turned a little doubtfully to his young partner.

"What d' you think, Bob?" he queried. "I reckon old monkey-face ain't altogether a fool. According to the yarn we heard there was always water here. I was dead sure we would be able to fill up."

Bob stretched himself in the scant shade afforded by a pinnacle of rock, and bit a piece of tobacco from the plug he carried. Never before had he chewed tobacco, but to smoke on such a journey seemed sheer folly.

"Of course, I don't understand these things like you do, Joe," he conceded, "but this is how I work it out. We're nearly five days from the last spot where we found water; that means it is only four days to the place we're aiming for. We go back five days with the water we've got, and admit we're beat; or we go on only four days, and win out."

"True enough, lad, so far as it goes, but listen to me: We go back five days, and there's water close by for the rest of the way. We go on four days, and if we don't find water, where are we? We're up in the air, and as dead as if we cut our throats. This here is reckoned a good water-hole, and it's dried right out. According to the old tale, it ain't anything much of a water-hole where we're aiming."

"Well—maybe they've had rains up that way."

Joe laughed his appreciation.

"That's the spirit, Bob, but I'm responsible for you. I promised your dad not to take more risks than we had to."

"But we don't know that it is a risk. Thanks to the cunning of that filthy nigger, we've conserved our water supply jolly well. We've chewed sun-scorched melons and have found liquid in some of those funny cactus things. And I've got so used to managing without water that I reckon I shouldn't know what to do with it if you offered me a long drink. I'm all dried up inside, but it don't worry me. I tell you I'm turning into a camel, and the desert don't trouble me any more. Joe, old man, I just can't turn back. We got to find some diamonds, or we might just as well go back and kick dad off the old farm. Do you think I care a darn what sort of risk I take, so long as there is a chance of winning out? A hundred to one chance or a thousand to one chance—"

"Say a million to one, and you're just about there. What good will it do your father if you leave your bones out in the sand? Dead, you ain't worth anything to him. But if you get back alive, even without the diamonds, you may still manage to help somehow."

"Help! What sort of help have I been, and me knowing all along how bad things were going? No, I tell you, Joe, I've got to win out on this trip. We'll hustle that nigger to make him find more of those melons and cactus things, and we'll keep our water so that we'll still have some left—"

Joe snorted his derision.

"What good'll that do?" he demanded. "It'll be nine days back, and even with all the water we got left now, we couldn't manage that. You got to drink just so much, going through this heat, or you dry right up inside and drop dead. I've seen mules go that way. I tell you it's sheer madness to go on—"

Once more Bob played his trump card.

"Well," he admitted reluctantly, "you're the leader. If you're afraid, and want to turn back, I reckon I must come, too. But I want you to know that this old desert don't scare *me*."

It was unfair, because he knew very well that Joe's fears were not for himself; but he had set his heart on going on.

"You know darned well I ain't afraid," Joe replied, mildly enough. "I'm telling you it's mad to go on, and so it is. But I'll tell you this as well: I been traipsing up and down this old country for about fifty years, and I ain't never said 'no' when a partner of mine wanted to go on. Any fool can turn back, Bob, but the fool who goes on ain't got any yellow streak in him. Put it there, boy."

He held out a massive, much scarred fist, and they shook hands solemnly.

"I'm going to live on the smell of water," Bob maintained. "But if there are any diamonds where we're going, I'm going to get them."

"Like enough. But whether they won't get you in the end, and me too, is another story. Let's get on."

THEY resumed their laborious journey through the torrid heat of the afternoon, and it was noticeable that the Bushman made no protest. That night they halted in a rock-bound gulley, where there was shelter from the biting, sand-laden wind that came with the dark. There was no fuel of any kind with which to make a fire, so they chewed at a strip of dried meat and ate sparingly of flour which had previously been baked. Then they drank even more sparingly of their precious water, and lay for a while in silence as the light flickered out of the sky.

Presently Joe rose with a grunt of weariness and searched in his pack till he found a little coil of thin, strong rope.

"We got to get moving early tomorrow," he remarked, "and there ain't no sense in us taking it in turns to watch this blinkin' savage. He seems to have calmed down, but it don't do to take risks."

Deftly he tied the hands of the Bushman and attached the loose end of the rope to his own wrist. Then he kicked off his boots.

"I reckon he's fixed, Bob," he said. "Time we turned in."

"Yes. I didn't sleep over much last night. There was a jackal kept howling right in my ear, so it seemed. Now what the blazes can a jackal find to eat in a country like this?"

"Rats and insects. Occasionally he gets a real bang-up feast when a couple o' fools like you and me think we can snap our fingers at the desert."

Bob laughed quietly.

"They'd find you mighty tough, Joe," he said. "G' night."

They scooped out hollows in the drifted sand and made pillows of their packs and water-skins. Then they stretched their tired limbs and moved their bodies from side to side cunningly, till the sand-beds fitted them well and comfortably. Very soon they were sleeping soundly.

Beside them the Bushman also appeared to sleep, though his cunning mind was as active as his body was still. When they stayed awake to watch him he could do nothing; but to tie his hands in this wise and think he was helpless was the height of foolishness. He, son of a Korhanna father, greatest of all thieves! The time was propitious, too, for but a day's journey to the east was a deep water-hole that never dried, and about it he knew a score of his fellows were camped.

As he lay he gloated over his imminent triumph. Had not he been kicked most painfully when they caught him at their packs, and had he not been made to walk on and on when he wanted to go back? Moreover he hated all white men, and it would be a good deed to kill them.

Ah, to kill them! He grinned into the darkness as he played with the idea. At first he had been fully determined to do so, for he had a sharp knife, and he knew just where to strike. But suppose the first man cried a little as he struck, and the other wakened? They were terrible men, both of them.

Like most of his race, he was an abject coward, and the very thought of what might happen if his plan miscarried sent shivers of apprehension to his craven heart. So, his fear tempering his lust to slay, he thought over other ways in which his vengeance might be satisfied at less personal risk. And presently his bestial little eyes shone like a cat's at the thoughts that came to him, and he longed to cry aloud in his elation.

He lay quite still for some hours, however, and it was only when the young moon had sunk out of sight that he roused himself to activity. Then, apparently without the least difficulty, he twisted his hands loose from the circling rope and felt in his tattered shirt for the short, sharp knife hidden at his waist. Silently as any ghost he rose to his feet and stood looking down at the sleeping men with an evil grin distorting his hideous face. He felt the edge of the knife with a blunt forefinger, and sighed regretfully; for it was very, very sharp, and the one white man was sleeping with his head thrown back. Still, the other plan was equally certain and, in many respects, much better.

Like a shadow he crouched beside Macdonald, and began to work the water-skin from under his head. Inch by inch he did this, with infinite deftness and patience, and so gently that the sleeping man never stirred. After all, it was child's play for a Korhanna. And when he had secured the one skin, he immediately set to work to obtain the other. Then he drank till he could drink no more, and knew that for two days thirst would not trouble him.

But this was only half of the plan. He let the rest of the water run softly into the sand, and then put an empty skin by the side of each man. Truly a wonderful trick!

As some evil bird of the night might watch its prey, he stood looking at them for a little while, laughing silently and making derisive gestures with his stringy arms. Most desperately he wanted the rifle, but he feared it might be arranged as a trap, so that it would go off if he touched it. Ah well, he could follow them, and get the gun—afterward.

Almost was he tempted to waken them, for now that the moon had sunk he could easily get away; but the cowardice that was his inheritance held him back, and he was careful to make no noise. So for a while he made silent and hideous pantomime, and then the darkness swallowed him up—

MACDONALD woke as the first streaks of daylight were showing in the east—woke completely and without fuss, as do men who have lived their lives in the open. He pulled casually at the rope to which their guide should have been fastened—and then sat up abruptly.

The riddle was all too easy to read. The knots he had tied so carefully had not even been unfastened, and the loops that had held the Bushman's wrists were still as he had made them. Then he saw the emptied water-skins, and the brutal derision of it made him swear long and fervently; but otherwise he gave no sign of the thoughts that assailed him.

Bob heard him, and sat up, supporting himself on one elbow.

"Bob," said Joe, in a voice from which all emotion had been carefully eliminated, "that blanked Tottie has wriggled off 'n the rope and left us."

"Well," Bob replied philosophically, "he wasn't much use except to find those melon things. We can follow the old river course without him easy enough."

Then he caught sight of the empty skins, and whistled.

"That's a real Hottentot trick, isn't it?" he observed. "Wonder why he didn't grab your gun while he was about it. Surely that would have been easy."

Macdonald swallowed hard. To all intents and purposes they were condemned to cruel and certain death, but the youngster's nerve didn't falter.

"Son," he said solemnly, "we're right up against it. But I guess you and me can teach that nigger something. We just got to win through now. He'll be flitting round where he can keep an eye on us, so he can get the gun and the rest of our stuff when we—give up. That's certain sure. Well, maybe he'll get what he wants and maybe he won't. I'm going to nick the nose of one of my cartridges, and when we're finished and them darned vultures are hopping round, I'll lay for him. He'll show up right enough, and I'll bag him before I go."

"Good for you, Joe. I should hate to think he was fiddling about me after I was dead. I take it we go on now?"

"Sure. It's our only chance, and a mighty slim one at that. Even if there's water at the place we're aiming for, it's three days away, and that's two days too long without water."

"Three days without water," Bob said softly, "and in a country like this! Looks like finish for us."

"That's so. But we'll put up a good fight. See if perhaps there's a drop or two left in that skin.

They managed to get a few spoonfuls of water from each skin, and it put new heart into them.

"That's what they call an omen," said Joe. "Our first bit of luck. Take the skin along, boy, or we won't never get back even if we find water. We ain't dead yet, not by a long chalk."

He sat down and pulled on his boots, and each of them chewed some dried meat. Their faces were grave, but there was no hint of surrender in their demeanor.

Then began their pitiful struggle against the grim forces of nature. At their best speed they pressed forward through the drifted sand and over rocky barrens, silently, and with stark determination written on their deeply tanned faces. On they struggled, for they knew they must cover as great a distance as possible before the stupefying heat of midday forced them to halt. Without water it would be sheer madness to travel when the sun was at its highest.

At ten o'clock they rested, crouched closely together in the scant shade thrown by a boulder. Already they felt the effects of not having had their morning ration of water.

"And to think," Joe exploded miserably, "that that blasted Tottie of ours is makin' for his friends, nice and comfortable, with his belly full of water, because I don't know yet how to tie up a nigger! Like as not he knows a place close by, full of them sweet little melons, cool and juicy. Or one of them funny pools on the top of a rock, what nobody knows how they come. I bet he knows, but he wasn't letting on to us."

"It's this waiting that gets me," Bob said. "Sitting and doing nothing, when every minute counts."

"If we try to push on now, son, we'll go real loony in a couple of hours. Start singing and trotting round in circles. And that Tottie will be watching, laughing himself sick."

They spoke no more, for their throats were parched, and it was an effort. Macdonald lay on his back, with his head against the rock, and made no attempt to move when the fierce heat crept higher and higher up his body as the sun approached its zenith. Absolutely motionless he lay, his muscles relaxed and his eyes shut; but there was the hint of a smile about his grim mouth.

At three o'clock they went on, though the heat was still appalling. Young as he was, Bob had done his share of roughing it, and still had a full grip of his powers. As for Macdonald, he was made of leather and whipcord, and could keep going till he dropped dead in his tracks.

At sundown they had a wonderful piece of luck, for they stumbled on a small patch of desert melons. Half a dozen of them, small and half withered, but they meant life. They sat down where they were, almost unable to believe their good fortune as they cut into the tough outer skins. And as they sucked up the moisture the sun sank in a blaze of glory, and wonderful shadows of gold and purple clothed the hideous nakedness of the desert and momentarily made it a fairyland.

"We'll do it, son," Joe said exultantly. "Them melons have made just all the difference. So long as the moon lasts we'll push on, and I reckon we'll be there by this time tomorrow. Can you keep going till midnight?"

"I'll bet I can—now! Before we found those melons I was just about beat."

As the sun went down a cold wind sprang up, keen-edged and sand-laden. Mercifully it blew from behind them, and though it was bone-dry, it was infinitely refreshing after the blistering heat of the day. They pressed forward with renewed vigor, but it was difficult work in the deceptive light of the moon, and as time passed they stumbled more and more frequently. Toward the end Bob was only half conscious, and Macdonald helped him—

* * *

PERFORCE they had to stop when the moon sank. The way was too full of knife-edged rocks and other dangers to be negotiated in the dark, and there was always the risk of stumbling out of the ill-defined course of the old river, and losing themselves hopelessly in the surrounding desert.

Bob collapsed the moment he stopped and was instantly asleep. The older man stretched him out as comfortably as might be, with his pack for a pillow, before he himself dropped into the sleep of utter exhaustion. And when the first hint of dawn showed in the east he rose stiffly, and shook the youngster to unwilling consciousness.

Bob's face was lined and drawn like that of an old man, and his lips were cracked; but his eyes still held the light of battle as he rose unsteadily to his feet. Without a word they resumed their hideous journey.

That day the full heat of the sun caught them where there was no friendly rock to afford even the semblance of shade. Laboriously they scooped a deep hole in the yielding sand and strove to contrive some sort of shelter; but it was a sorry attempt, and the blistering heat seemed to eat right into them. Long before it was time to move on again, Bob was croaking to himself in a ghastly whisper, and his fingers plucked ceaselessly at his khaki shirt. Joe knew well enough that this was the beginning of the end, but he himself was mumbling—

Visions of cool waters mocked them ceaselessly. The older man heard persistently the whisper of the long pencil of water that drops three hundred feet sheer at Howick, in Natal, while the younger swam eternally in the cool dam at his father's farm. Each muttered incoherently, taking pitiful comfort from his own distraught imagination.

But at last Bob scrambled to his feet with a hoarse cry, pointing away to the east. Suddenly there had appeared miles of water sparkling in the sun, flecked with rushes here and there to tell of its shallowness, flanked to the one side by a few tall thorn trees. He made as if to hurry toward that wonderful promise of succor, but Macdonald grabbed at him, and clung on relentlesssly. Well he knew that this was only the mirage supposed to be reflected from the 'Ngami marshes hundreds of miles to the north, and that if once they left the course of the old river-bed they were doomed beyond any possibility of doubt.

Bob fought him, but feebly. As they wrestled there the mirage slowly faded away, and they collapsed together in their clumsy shelter. But neither muttered now; the shock had at least served to bring home to each how perilously near they were to the line of insanity.

As though by common consent they moved on early in the afternoon. Despite their exhaustion they made fair progress, for they had a line, and the sheer will to live drove them on.

Only a mile or so from where they had borne the full heat of the day the old river-bed narrowed between the confines of two well-marked outcrops of basaltic rock. Here, where there could be no possibility of their missing them, were the fragments of a dozen or more of the little desert melons, spoiled of their precious contents, and flung scornfully on the sand to be dried out by the sun's heat. A refinement of torture that only the brain of a Hottentot could conceive.

But in his sheer desire to make the torment as lavish and complete as possible, the Bushman had blundered. Not all of the moisture had been dried out of the fleshy part of the melon just within the tough skin. Many of the fragments were as so much leather; but here and there, particularly towards the side of the depression were pieces from which a little moist matter could still be extracted. The two men hunted feverishly, each for himself, gnawing desperately when luck favoured them.

The light of sanity came back to their eyes, and they managed to grin at each other. It was so little they had found, but it meant everything to them.

"Maybe we started sooner than he thought we would," Joe guessed. "Or else he was just fool, as these Totties are when they try to think. Maybe he even wanted us to push on a bit; only then he wouldn't have busted them, would he? But he's bust his own luck, Bob. No Korhanna would waste one of them melons any more than an Arab would poison the waters of an oasis. He's gone clean up against all his own gods just to rub it in on us, and his own gods are the ones that count in a place like this. The luck's going to change right from now."

Bob nodded. He didn't want to speak because his throat was still dried out, and he knew the relief they had obtained from the fragments of melon would be very transitory. He was shriveled up, a mere husk; but he followed at once when Macdonald went forward.

They revived a little with the coming of the night, though their tongues were blackened and swollen and their eyes showed unnaturally bright in deep, dirt-streaked sockets. They had really lost count of time and distance, but knew that somewhere ahead was the one chance in a million for which they struggled.

Bob was beginning to throw everything away now, which is the worst sign of all; behind him old Joe collected mechanically and quite unconsciously, only his instinct telling him that they had nothing they could afford to sacrifice. They fell more and more frequently, and the older man found it increasingly difficult to rouse the younger after each fall. And yet once, when he himself fell over a ledge of rock, and lay there because it was out of the question to think of ever rising again, it was Bob who crawled back, and pinched and tore until for very shame Macdonald struggled up. Later both of them were crawling on hands and knees, oblivious of their sufferings, hardly human—

A feeling of warmth on his back told Macdonald that another day had come and he was alive. What had happened during the night he knew not—whether he had crawled on or slept—but here was day. The tonic air of the dawn brought back his wandering senses, and he became aware that he was alone. His perceptions quickened, and he glanced searchingly around. A little way back he could see a few vultures circling slowly in the heavens, and even as he looked one began to drop earthwards. Not more than a couple of hundred yards, perhaps, but with what agony had that little distance been traversed! With an inarticulate gasp he shuffled back.

Bob, roused with terrible effort and difficulty, scrambled to his feet, and stood there swaying. He had reached the limit of endurance, and only his eyes really lived. He took one faltering step and collapsed. Macdonald reached for a small piece of rock, and belabored the twitching form— Presently they were moving on, arm in arm, a travesty of progress. The first hour of the sun would mean the end.

BUT Macdonald halted abruptly, and a hoarse croak came from his withered throat. Close ahead of them rose a lofty pinnacle of rock, hidden hitherto because the old river bed was so low. There it stood, flanked by two lesser pinnacles, just as the story they both knew so well had said. They broke into a dreadful, scrambling run, falling constantly from weakness, but no longer lying inert. The instinct to live was tearing at them, and straight ahead was the promise of water.

So at last they won to the base of the lofty pinnacle, and beside it saw a depression where the marks of hoofs and claws still showed. They began to dig with their torn hands, throwing the sand aside with sudden, frenzied strength. Ever deeper grew the hole, but always the sand was dry and powdery, silting back as they dug, mocking at their efforts. And overhead the vultures, who understand these things, circled in leisurely flight.

Bob, in the midst of his labor, checked suddenly, and sat up with a curious, rattling cry. Then he slumped forward across the hole, and lay quite still. Macdonald pushed him aside and went on digging.

But into his reeling brain came the sudden recollection that he was responsible for Bob. He stopped digging, nor did he notice that now the sand was beginning to stick to his fingers; he sidled across to Bob, but paused as the light flashing on a small glass-like stone they had groveled up with the sand sent another message to his brain. He picked up the little stone, and lay down beside Bob.

"Di'mond," he whispered. "All right now, Bob—"

In the immense silence of the desert he heard a falling stone rattle on rock. The merest echo of sound, but it brought back all his wandering faculties. He had sworn to Bob that he would bag the Bushman, and he would. His veins seemed filled with fire, and the mists had cleared from his brain. But he would have to be very artful, or he would never succeed.

He struggled to his knees, made as if to rise, and then fell forward on his face. But now the rifle he had never abandoned was in position, and he knew just where that sound had come from. Quite still he lay, apparently dead, while the sun began to climb higher in the heavens, and the vultures circled ever lower.

Till at last one bird, bolder than the rest, alighted with a harsh rustle of feathers but a few yards away, and after a few minutes' wait, hopped awkwardly toward them.

At that, as though it had been a long awaited signal, a hideous, yellow-brown face showed above a ridge of rocks not more than a couple of hundred yards away, and then the Bushman stepped cautiously into the open. There was a grin of delight on his thick lips, and he came forward confidently.

Joe let him come to within fifty yards, and then lifted the ready muzzle of the gun. The Bushman saw, but he was not quick enough. At the sharp report he screamed horribly, spun round, and fell down. He began to crawl dreadfully away, but the stained sand told its own story.

Joe had heard the *thud* of the bullet, and that was enough. He had fired low, so as to make quite certain. He rolled over, and his outflung hand dropped into the hole he had dug—

With an inarticulate cry he swung right round. The hand was wet! He hardly dared to look, but there could be no doubt of it. In the bottom of the hole was a couple of inches of cool, clear water—water—water!

The habit of the wild saved him then. Very cautiously he dipped up a little in his hands, and just rinsed his mouth. Then he allowed himself two swallows—no more. But it made him a new man. He dragged Bob to the edge of the hole, and began to damp his cracked mouth. Very carefully, allowing just a few drops to trickle in— He was terribly afraid, but Bob was tough.

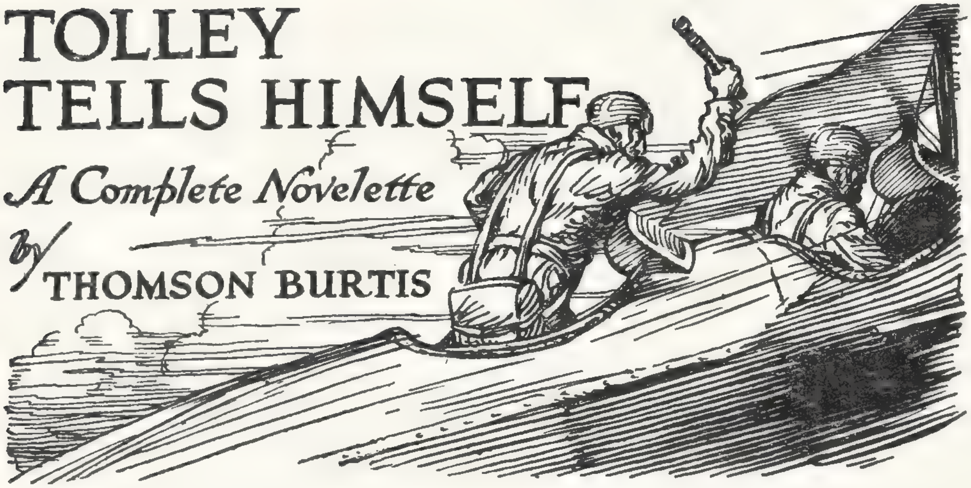
He had a few more swallows himself, for human nature has its limitations. Then he trickled more drops into Bob's mouth, watching the throat the while. Presently something moved, and Bob swallowed creakingly. The old man gave him a little more, then laid him down gently, and went toward where they had shed their packs in that last scramble. There was a tin mug—

"I *knew* that nigger had busted his luck," he muttered, as he came back, weaving strangely in his walk, but quite convinced that everything was now all right.

TOLLEY TELLS HIMSELF

A Complete Novelette

by THOMSON BURTIS



Author of "Slim Grabs Some Grease," "Groody and the Gushers," etc.

"TELL 'EM" TOLLEY hit Cook Field less than a month before Luke Haswell, of the Kentucky mountain Haswells, crowned the Haswell record by killing Lieutenant Frank Grady. That was a mistake on Luke's part, I may mention in passing, although it did something for Tolley.

Anyhow, we'd heard that when Tolley collided with anything—including the Navy line, when he'd been at West Point—the reverberations were easily audible to the naked ear. Nevertheless, I was totally unprepared for the rapid sequence of events which Tell 'Em generated when he arrived at our quiet little field in the center of Ohio.

I—I being Lieutenant "Slim" Evans of the same Army Air Service—had just been wrestling with the helicopter. Being one of the eight test pilots for the Army at Cook Field had given me several unique and extraordinary feelings, here and there, but this helicopter topped 'em all.

In case you aren't familiar with the term, a helicopter is a piece of flying mechanism which is supposed to lift itself by its own boot-straps. It rises straight into the air, without any take-off whatsoever.

This one had been dragged in by a Russian inventor and had flown, of course, long before I salved my curious nature by taking a shot at it. It was a hybrid looking affair consisting of four bays, constructed of duralumin braces and spars, uncovered. At the tip of each bay was a six-bladed propeller, set horizontally. Then there was a four-bladed prop for the purpose of dragging it through the air after it had risen from the ground. All of these propellers—or wings, as the four lifters were usually called—were run by one Gnome motor set in the center, close to the pilot's seat.

It was certainly an experience to cause you to hover between a hearty guffaw and a feeling of awe, as it were. I grasped the wheel firmly, and set the four wings revolving like mad. They're not wood or metal, but big blades covered with linen. In the midst of tremendous din, doggoned if the naked old skeleton didn't start going up into the air as straight as an elevator.

As always, a considerable mob was watching, and down the line of hangars mechanics stopped their work to look on. The first five or six feet were negotiated with fair speed, but from then on it was slow work. Finally, at around ten feet, she'd go no higher.

The sharps who infest Cook Field—Cook being the experimental field of the Army Air Service—had it all figured out that up to that height the threshing wings upheld the machine on a cushion of air which they'd formed themselves. Above that height, the cushion escaped.

Anyhow, I started to fly the thing across the field. And my liver got jarred plenty. With the four-bladed tractor propeller going full steam, and the four wings threshing away like so many factories under full power, the thing I was riding just hopped around the field. From cushion to cushion, you see. And making noise enough for a squadron of regular airplanes going a hundred and fifty miles an hour.

It wouldn't go any higher, and it wouldn't fly smoothly.

It was an experience, at that. However, I soon got sick of imitating a grasshopper, and brought her down ten feet gradually. She hit the ground hard, shook me up a bit, and that was that.

"I could make more speed on a pogo stick," I told the grinning "Tex" MacDowell. "But at that it felt uncanny to go straight up in the air. It won't be long before a man's chimney'll be his landing field, at that."

"There was a sandy-haired bird here a minute ago who was laughing himself sick," drawled the big Texan, who'd come from the border to Cook with me. "He wanted to fly it right away and show that it could be flown more smoothly. He likewise stated that you could get higher on your own legs than the heley had taken you."

"So?" I returned. "Who might he be?"

"Don't know. But I think it's this fellow Tolley, just got in. He started away before you got down, sniffing hilariously."

"So the football star and parachute jumper has arrived, eh?" I inquired oratorically. "He'll be the first of the West Point crop I've looked at."

I started for the flying section office, to make my report, and Tex ambled along. He's a six-foot-two Texan, but alongside my lanky height he looked to be merely average size. I'm so tall I have to duck airplanes frequently when walking about a flying field, and so thin I look even taller.

"Well," I remarked, "I'll be glad to look over the boy that made sixty yards against the Navy on eight consecutive plunges, at that. He must be pretty good for a new man, or he wouldn't be ordered here right after finishing his flying course—"

"He's not here as a pilot," Tex interjected. "He's some sort of an engineering hound, I understand. Stood about second, or maybe first, in his class at the Point. He must be a fair flyer at that—"

"Plenty of nerve, anyway," I agreed. "That collision with Farrar down in Texas, if the papers got it straight, didn't pound his stock down any."

Which was no more than the exact truth. When still a very green cadet, this Tolley had been run into by a still greener cadet, and the ships had locked wings. The greener of the two had jumped in his 'chute, as was entirely right and proper, and the act of a gentleman and a scholar. This Tolley bird, though, former quarterback of the Army football team, had stuck by his ship after wrenching it loose, and fluttered, dived, sideslipped and just plain fallen with it. By some miracle, and uncanny flying on the part of a green man, he'd brought her down safely.

According to Jim Selden and others who were there, the kid was as cool as a cucumber. He simply announced that he hadn't jumped because he thought he could bring the ship down without destroying it.

We forgot him, though, long before we'd traversed the line, past all manner of ships, and climbed the steps up to the flying office. As we entered, Redding, the little Scotchman who's chief test pilot, turned from his conversation with three pilots and one stranger, and said:

"C'mere, boys. Lieutenant Tolley, Slim Evans and Tex MacDowell. Tolley's going to be here at Cook a while—over in the engineering department."

"Well, well, so here they are, eh?" interrupted the tall, slim, well-set up youngster who was Tolley. "Glad to know you, Slim old man. You too, Tex. Heard a lot about you both. We'll have a lot of good times, eh? You tell 'em!"

And forthwith he gave me a resounding slap on my bony back.

Well, that business didn't give me any appetite. The familiar geniality wasn't any soothing symphony to my ears, and any guy who starts calling me "old man" before he's known me for five years hasn't any chance of enjoying my society.

"Glad to know you," I snapped, and Tex, likewise, shook hands with considerable reserve.

"Well," chortled Tolley, "you've got to give these two border patrolmen credit for one thing! They've sure cracked up enough ships, eh? Gosh! Seems as though every time I pick up the Air Service News Letter, or even a daily paper, I see where one of 'em's cracked up another ship! What about it, Slim? You tell 'em!"

I didn't notice what he was saying much. I was too busy giving him a close look over, taking in all important points.

He didn't look a great deal like a ball-carrying quarterback who, in the last five minutes of the last Army-Navy game, had given the ball to himself ten straight times and carried it from beyond midfield over into Navy territory and right over the goal line. And he'd been working behind a disorganized substitute line, with the slight aid of three backs who were reeling with fatigue.

His shoulders were good, but his army breeches showed thin, straight legs, and his blouse indicated a very small, almost feminine, waist. Nevertheless, he was well-set up, and his trim body must have been made of steel and rubber.

His face was rather thin, too, with a turned-up nose and wide mouth saving it from being the sappy movie type as far as features were concerned. He was slightly freckled, and crisp, sandy hair waved gently from the part in the exact center of his head. His eyes were fine—very blue, and large, and holding a perpetual sparkle.

Therein, it seemed to me, lay the remarkable thing about him. Energy and personality fairly seemed to crackle from every part of him. His grin was wide and sincere, and when it adorned his freckled countenance the whole face was literally aglow. As his tongue clacked on one could fairly feel the bounding vitality which was bursting within him. He was a human chunk of radium, as well as a phonograph, apparently.

"How do you two get your names in the papers so much?" he was asking Tex with a wide grin. The others were listening and looking on, and it was plain to be seen that they were trying to get their breath. "Tell us the secret, eh? Some press agent you must have! You tell 'em."

Tex merely grinned that lop-sided, whimsical grin of his, while his glowing eyes met mine. I'll swear I had to laugh—that sandy-haired demon was so naïve and without self-consciousness that you couldn't resent his prattle. The others were divided between amazement, awe and dislike, I think.

"Well, I'm certainly glad to be up here with you boys," Tolley told us all magnanimously. "We'll have some great old times, eh? Any time any of you want to learn the Tolley turn, I'd be glad to show it to you. Heard about it, haven't you? I originated it down at Brooks Field, and every one that ever saw it says that it's the most sensational stunt ever done! I'd be glad to take any of you up and show it to you."

I couldn't believe my ears. There'd been silence, on our part, before, but suddenly it seemed to thicken until it was oppressive.

OLD men, anywhere and in any business, have a right to expect a certain humility on the part of a newcomer. Until he's learned the ropes, anyhow. And here was a young squirt whom we all knew was fresh from the Point, had chosen the Air Service, just finished his cadet training, and couldn't have had two hundred hours in the air. He was pompously offering to teach hardened veterans how to fly.

Not pompously, either. Just naturally.

It was too much for big, slow-moving, sullen "Atom" Adams. Atom, despite his huge bulk, was usually slow to wrath, but he had a sardonic tongue and a habit of showing his dislike.

"How do you perform it?" he rasped. "Talk it, I presume."

Tolley's eyes snapped over to Adams, and a slight flush flamed in his cheeks.

"I can back up anything I say!" he stated incisively. "You're one man I probably couldn't teach it to, anyhow. You're not a stunt pilot."

Lieutenant Atom Adams, one of the greatest big-ship pilots in the world, figuratively rose on all fours like an embattled grizzly.

"Listen, you," he growled. "One more wise crack out of you and your duty at Cook Field'll start about a month from now—after you get out of the hospital. I thought West Point taught little boys to keep their mouths shut until it came time to say their prayers—alone!"

Tolley didn't flare up, as I rather expected from the cut of his jib. He knew he was right. He was so sure of it that he didn't deign to get really angry at one of the common herd who differed with him.

"I know how you feel," he said kindly. "It's always the way with the old boys, when somebody comes along and starts something that's out of the rut. I remember when I was a plebe at the Point, and they put me on the Plebe team for the first scrimmage with the Varsity. 'Is it all right for a Plebe to score against the Varsity?' I asked 'em, and when I did it, boy, were those beefy Varsity men sore! You tell 'em!"

That last "you tell 'em," even to my philosophical and interested nature, was like a lash on a raw wound. He went on:

"Just because I haven't been flying since 1917, old boy, doesn't mean that I can't show you something! It doesn't take me all my life to learn anything. Don't get sore because I hurt your vanity. Didn't mean to. All in fun, eh? But no kidding, boys, this Tolley turn is a humdinger. You get into a dive, and after she's doing all she'll stand—"

"Oh, shut up!" grunted Adams.

"Huh?" barked Tolley, and whirled toward the chair where Adams was sitting.

"You heard me!" Adams told him. "Dick, what's on the cards for me today? Barling's due for that fuel consumption test, isn't it? I—"

"Listen!" snapped Tolley, and took two steps toward Adams.

His trig body was straight and tense, and yet, for some reason, it gave the impression of being filled with springs all coiled and ready to leap forth.

"I've gone through this stuff before," Tolley announced, a cold flame flickering in his eyes and his freckles standing out. "There's many a man tried to razz me when I hit a post or a school—but they never get away with it. Get that? So don't talk out of turn until I give you some reason for it—"

I decided it was time to avoid trouble. Adams was crouched in his chair, a scowl between his black, bushy brows, and his heavy face more sullen than usual.

"Come on—quit that!" I said sharply. "Nobody's going to razz you, Tolley. Dry up. We'll all be glad to take lessons from you."

That last remark slipped out, but I'd have gotten away with it if Tolley, who was no fool, hadn't caught the derisive grins on the faces around him.

He turned his attention to me.

"Say listen," he told me, utterly guiltless of fear or embarrassment. "I don't need any advice that I don't ask for. And I can take care of myself. And I can back up anything I can say. And just because you fellows rank me, and are older flyers, doesn't mean that I'll stand for a —— bit of guff from you, or Adams, or anybody else! And any time anybody here needs proof of that—just come on, one at a time. You tell 'em that Jim Tolley can—"

"Go to —— and stay there, as far as this field's concerned!" roared Adams.

He was on his feet. A taciturn, more or less lone wolf type, I could see that the talkative, self-confident Tolley had roped Adams' goat and was swinging it around his head.

Here Tolley said what to me was a remarkable thing. Never before nor since have I known one like him. Without visible wrath, but cold-bloodedly, he made his announcement.

"I can see," he said very slowly, "that it's up to me to prove right now that I can take care of myself, and won't stand for any razzberries whatever.

"Adams, you're not so keen about me, are you? Going to teach me a few things, eh? Think that in the next few months you're going to put me through a course of sprouts just because I'm a new man, eh? Well, you overgrown plow-horse, I'll knock the eye-teeth out of your head any time you say, and then I'll shake hands with you and call it off!"

Big Adams' face whitened slowly. His body sort of trembled, and his mouth opened and shut like a fish trying to breathe out of water.

We could have stopped it sooner, but I'll swear the rest of 'em, like myself, were keeping our fascinated gaze on the slim arrow of a youngster who stood there and did his stuff. There was something sublime about it.

Then, with a guttural growl of ungovernable rage, Adams bounded from his chair. Before anybody could say a word it was on.

Tolley, a mirthless smile on his face, sidestepped and ducked like a flash of light. As his fist went into Adams' stomach Atom brought a huge hand down on the back of Tolley's head.

It was as effective as hitting him with a club. He went down like a log.

As he bounded to his feet, I caught him, and Tex and Redding had the raging Adams.

"Be still, you —— fool!" I snarled to the writhing Tolley, and believe me it was worse than trying to hold an eel.

"All right," he said finally, and relaxed.

"This is —— foolishness!" Redding raved

to them both. "You're acting like a pair of kids. Tolley, you've got no business in this office. Get out of it—now. You—"

"All right, I will," Tolley interrupted cooly. "But I'm going to lick the daylights out of Adams before he gets a foot off this field—"

That went down with Adams just about like a dose of castor oil and bitters. And the rest of us gagged on it, too. Tolley, cool, icy, unafraid, was still announcing himself. And to a man who outweighed him fifty pounds, and was, I knew, as terrible a rough-and-tumble fighter as the field boasted.

Well, the end of it was that Redding, aroused to fighting pitch himself, settled the matter by saying:

"You're going to establish yourself that way, eh? Prove how good you are, eh? Well, mister, we'll give you a chance!"

Five minutes later it had been arranged. Downtown in Dayton, in a barn on the outskirts, they were going to fight it out that night. And the flyers would all be there.

"Fine!" stated Tolley, cool and assured. "Sorry this big guy here had to get so uppity and bring this on, but I always like to show folks right at the start that Jim Tolley isn't to be monkeyed with!"

Adams frothed at the mouth, but we muzzled him and cooled him off. I'd never seen the big boy get that way before—he was like a shaggy bear stung beyond endurance by a buzzing gadfly.

That night, at ten o'clock, a select little gathering consisting of the eight test pilots of the Army Air Service, plus Jim Tolley, gathered in the electric-lighted barn which a farmer friend of Redding's loaned for the occasion. Adams, lowering and wrathful, was a mental as well as physical contrast to Tolley. That lean youngster bore no malice, to my experienced eye. He was like a prize-fighter entering the ring with a certain purpose in mind, without any personalities entering the matter at all.

Both stripped to running pants and jerseys, and there came to view as fine a pair of shoulders as I've ever seen on a man as slim as Tolley. He was a physical specimen such as rarely comes along, without any doubt. In white jersey and trunks, with his sandy hair gleaming and that aura of crackling life about him, he was a human flame, and nothing less.

No rounds or anything were in the arrangement, but lightweight gloves were. Tolley'd said anything suited him, from bare fists to a finish, a regular round-by-round fight. Adams, however, wanted to get it over.

I had to admire the guts of the youngster, at that, as he danced up to his huge, heavily muscled opponent. Conceited as he was, there was something above the average in him. He was ready to fight the whole wide world for his rights—and what he considered his rights seemed to include *carte blanche* to do anything that came into his head without regard for discipline, good form, courtesy or humility.

He circled around the firmly planted Adams, darting in and out like a streak of light. His blows were straight drives from the shoulders, and they weren't love taps, either. He was a marvelous boxer—as elusive as some swift-gliding wraith. Six times he pasted Adams, once a crushing right to the jaw, but Atom never rocked on his feet. He was made of iron.

Then Tell 'Em Tolley flashed in, feinted with his right, and shot his left to Adams' jaw again, the right crashing through for a one-two as Adams' right came around. Tolley snapped his head back, but too late. That bone-crushing right slammed home to his ear, and the new man was knocked ten feet.

He was up like a rubber ball, apparently unhurt. It started again, Adams boring in slowly, with the inevitability of fate, while the brilliant Tolley darted in and out. His blows were terrific for one so light, and they hurt Adams, but the big fellow did not go down. Every once in a while he got in a blow—and when he did, Tolley went down.

Four minutes—five. Tolley was bleeding from the nose and mouth, and even his shoulders had huge red welts on them. There was a wild glare in his eyes as he sank blow after blow to the stomach, and still could not floor the human rock ahead of him. Adams took all Tolley had to give, and kept coming on.

Head-down, shaggy black hair in wild disarray, eyes gleaming from beneath bushy eyebrows, Atom was for the moment a killer with one aim in life. One eye was partly closed, and his lower lip split. His stomach had taken a terrible battering—but he hadn't even swayed on his solidly planted feet.

Six minutes, and the silent watchers knew that it was all over. Tolley was gasping for breath, although he did not let down, and his blows had lost their sting. Like some inhuman piece of avenging machinery, Adams was always after him. It was unequal, but Tolley had asked for it.

"He might as well learn his lesson," I told Redding, and the little Scotchman nodded.

"It'll make the lad fit to live with, maybe," he said through clenched teeth.

It wasn't easy to watch, at that. I disliked the football star, of course, while I yielded the tribute of admiration for his sublime egotism. Even so, I didn't enjoy seeing him learn his lesson. Now Adams was flooring him every fifteen seconds or so, and the gasping Tolley could scarcely stand. He arose from the last knockdown, weaving on his feet, and Atom threw a pleading look at me. He dropped his arms, and stepped back as Tolley staggered forward.

Through puffed lips came a snarled—

"Fight, you big stiff!"

As he said that, Tell 'Em swung, and his fist hit Adams' jaw. It was as effective as the tickling of a feather.

I nodded, although I hated to, and moved my fist suggestively. Tolley must be tamed.

Adams stepped back and measured him. His ham-like fist thudded home to Tolley's chin, and he crumpled like a sack of meal. He lay still, and Adams dropped his arms wearily.

Tex and I jumped toward him, and started to lift the fallen pilot. As I heaved at his shoulders, one eye came open, and Tolley struggled weakly. As I got him to his feet he threw me off.

"Where is he?" he muttered, and made a pass at Tex.

"It's all over—you were knocked out!" I told him.

As though I'd sent a current of new life through him, his body straightened.

"Like —— I was! I wasn't on the floor five seconds! Where is he?"

He shook his head as though to clear it, and his one good eye glared around the dim recesses of the barn. When he saw Adams, taking off his gloves, he started for him at a staggering run.

"C'mon—I've just started!" he said thickly, and hurled himself at his conqueror.

I give you my word that Adams grabbed him around the waist, got him loose, and then threw him fifteen feet gainst a wall.

"Don't be a —— fool!" he rasped, but there was a glint of admiration in his eyes—or eye. One was in temporary eclipse.

It took the united ministrations of Tex and Redding and I to keep Tolley from tangling with Adams again.

He rode into Dayton with Tex and I in my roadster, relic of my prosperous oil days, and his head was bloody but unbowed.

"When I fight him again I'll lick the tar out of him," he announced. "He's hard to down, and I wore myself out trying to box with an ox."

He had no rancor—he was merely sure of his ability to beat any one, any time, at anything.

AND for the next two days dope accumulated on him with dizzying speed. As I've said, he apparently held no malice against Adams, but the gadfly had Atom Adams' goat tethered right in his front yard. The new man was very prevalent around the field. He gave his opinions calmly, but with forthright and emphatic mien, and about everything. He didn't talk loudly, nor was he so much of a braggart as a naïve egotist. He criticized young Chick Hawkins' stunt flying—which was like a maiden lady giving expert criticism to Babe Ruth on home-run making—and whenever he differed with any person, policy or opinion he said so plainly—and the —— of it was he was always right. When he generously offered to prove to Chick that a barrel roll could be done with some peculiar stick motion in smoother fashion than Chick had been in the habit of doing it, he was merely being himself. He took it for granted that every one knew he was an authority. Grinning readily, oozing personality and pep, he was the joke and the mystery and the bane of the field as with every hour his prominence increased.

Mostly through Adams. Atom had been stung from his lethargy, and every time Tolley said, "You tell 'em!" Adams' raw sensibilities writhed anew. He really disliked Tolley. And when Adams was around he never let the youngster get a foot. Let him start, "When I was at the Point I told them—" and Adams would interrupt with "Shut up!"

If he started an opinion in Atom's presence, the same barked words would smother his statement. If he started it again, that inevitable "Shut up!" stopped him again.

There's not a thing a man can do under those circumstances, except shut up or fight. And Tolley did the latter. Collected reports showed that Adams knocked Tolley cold and kicking three times the first day, and four times the second. He'd let Tolley talk, except when the green pilot started something personal. Then a barrage of "shut ups" which left him helpless with rage.

Tolley challenged him to another battle, begged him to fight it out, but Adams would not. The big fellow just kept on his trail, and when Tolley went wild and attacked him Atom methodically crashed his fist in and sent Tell 'Em into cuckooland.

It was funny, in a way—and yet a grim tragedy in another. Always Tell 'Em came back for more—he was as cocky and opinionated as though he hadn't been beaten to a pulp. And he was as certain in his own mind that he could lick Adams with a fair chance that his self-esteem didn't suffer. We let it go on, because it seemed as good a way as any to tame the talking wildcat.

Gradually I heard enough of his career from himself and others to explain, if I took a spoiled boyhood for granted, what he was. As I told Tex one day when that drawling Southerner brought the news that Tolley had held the interscholastic record for all sprints up to the 220 when he was in High School:

"He's never been anything but top of the heap. Graduated from High School at fifteen, head of his class; one of the few four letter men the Point ever had; considered the best cadet flyer turned out since the war, and a mental marvel—he's just never run into anything to shake his confidence in himself!"

"I've known Englishmen that were like that just because they were Englishmen," nodded Tex. "But they're so sure of themselves they don't even talk about it, which is something Tell 'Em hasn't learned. Look at the —— fool!"

We were standing on the line, and Tell 'Em was up. Up easily eight thousand feet, in one of the new type Curtiss pursuit planes. They're of tubular steel construction, even to the control system, and can be treated pretty carelessly. But from his great height Tell 'Em came down in a shrieking, screaming nose dive that made Tex and me dizzy. He held it forever, it seemed, as the ship grew from a speck to the size of a bird, and then to full proportions with such rapidity that I thought I was looking at a trick picture. He dived five thousand feet if he did an inch, and if his speed wasn't close to four hundred miles an hour I'm the Emperor of Japan.

He pulled out gradually, and the ship didn't break in two. The next second he was *spinning upward*. He came the rest of the way down in a series of beautiful stunts, and finished off by doing a loop about two hundred feet of the ground, and landing out of it.

"He won't do that," Tex said slowly, "after he's once had a ship go bad on him—and got hurt."

"That's the trouble all the way through," I said in my customary erudite fashion. "He's been top of the heap in everything he did—a physical and mental freak who's never been taken down a peg. They tell me that even a Plebe's razzing at West Point didn't do any good—and when he got to be an upper classman he was just naturally so good an athlete—and likable—that he was a bigger hero than ever because he'd stood Coventry!"

But Adams finally got him. Licked a dozen times, it did not break Tolley, but it shook him out of his assured attitude. He seized every opportunity to twit Adams, and Atom could go into a frenzy easily when Tell 'Em was around. Tolley stooped from his Olympian height, and was fretted into attempted reprisal. Hatred grew between the two until it was an ugly, nasty thing to see. There was another fight, and Adams beat him to a pulp, but Tolley was cursing him and daring him to come on when the kid couldn't stand on his feet or see out of his puffed eyes.

So, being tenderhearted as ——, at times, I talked to the flashing, indomitable youngster like a Dutch uncle.

"You've got away with telling everybody how to do everything, for very simple reasons," I concluded, feeling sore and uncomfortable beneath his curiously patronizing smile. "Being an athlete, you could lord it around the Point. And doubtless, in your bunch of cadets, you were the best flyer and all that stuff, and got away. But you're up against men, now, and you, no matter how good you are, don't mean a —— to the Army at large or Cook Field in particular.

Lots of fellows here know more about flying than you do. And you're riding for a fall—boy, you've got plenty of broken bones and bawlings out and the rest coming to you before you can call yourself either an officer or a flyer! So pipe down, Tolley. It's for your own good I'm telling you—"

"Thanks, old man," he said magnanimously. "I appreciate your motive. But I'm doing fine, thank you, and I hope that some day you'll all learn that years don't make a man's true age, and that just because I haven't got gray whiskers doesn't mean I'm perfectly capable of taking care of myself. I'm having a —— of a good time, don't need anybody to tell me anything and when I finally tell Adams where to get off, the ——, all'll be well with yours truly. You tell 'em, Slim—and say its from me!"

"All right, you —— fool," I stated calmly. "Just wait."

The deuce of it was that he wasn't unpopular, until that deadly feud between him and Adams got so obvious that it was on every one's nerves. We just laughed when he laid down the law, as fool parents do to spoiled kids when they do their simple stunts. After my interview with him, though, I forgot the spell of his flashing smile and his youthful magnetism and uncanny, freakish genius. I disliked him, and I took him down every time I could.

Whereat he treated me as a dumb underling to be borne with, and my choicest arrows of sarcasm merely met with a patronizing smile. When he was able to smile, that is. Adams kept his face in a continual state of eruption. The pair could not leave each other alone. Tolley always started the actual physical battle, and Atom finished it. At first, as I've mentioned, Atom was just an impersonal obstacle for Tell 'Em to hurdle for the sake of his vanity. As time passed, though, that angle was obliterated. Tolley hated him. And I'm convinced that his sole object in life was to beat him to a pulp, thereby punishing him—and proving that Tolley *could* do it.

It turned the youngster into a crazy man. One morning, when the frowning, shaggy Adams had shut him up for the fifth time while he was trying to tell about his run in the Notre Dame game, Tell 'Em leaped to his feet and fairly crouched above the immobile Atom.

"By ——, Adams, you lay off me or I'll kill you!" he said slowly, and his face was not good to see.

What he was going through had neither penetrated his armor nor shaken his confidence in himself at all. But he was going crazy with hatred. And the taciturn, stoical Adams was a smouldering volcano which might go into deadly eruption at any moment.

I took counsel with myself, and got no argument. Then I interviewed Tex MacDowell. Then I hied me to the C. O.'s office. Major Berry was an old friend of mine. I'd served under him in France, and taught him to fly in this country before that.

I laid the *status quo* before him, taking it apart, showing him the various intricacies therein, and then putting them back together again. I followed that by presuming to make a few suggestions as between man and man.

AN HOUR later Tell 'Em was called to headquarters, and a half hour after that Tolley caught me on the line just as I was going up to carry out a stability test on a P. W. scout.

"So you're a sneaking, snitching tell-tale, are you?" spat the youngster, his blue eyes dancing coldly. "Well, listen, you long-legged skeleton! That long nose of yours pokes itself into too many things that don't concern you, see? And in my opinion you're—"

He went into considerable detail. Slim, straight, tense, he looked me in the eye and called me more than I've ever taken from any living human. His tongue just curled itself around me like a scorching whip. Fifty pounds lighter than I, a mere dwarf in comparison with my towering height, young, friendless, unconquerable, he did his stuff.

Why I didn't hit him I don't know. But I didn't. I took it, but I was sort of shaking. Not with wrath alone—with a sort of creepiness. The kid was uncanny, inhuman, some way. When he finished he stood there, chin in the air, snapping—

"Well, what are you going to do about it?"

I just said one sentence.

"Have as little to do with you, you —— idiot, as the good Lord'll let me, for fear I might not be able to resist killing you!"

From that moment on Tell 'Em Tolley never said a word to any one unless a question was asked him. He stalked through the day alone—and by all the signs he didn't care. Unpopularity couldn't affect him—nothing could. Occasionally, when his eyes rested on Atom Adams, there was a look in them that made your flesh crawl, but otherwise he was made of stone. He avoided no one, merely kept his mouth shut and let contempt blaze out through his eyes. His lips would curl scornfully whenever he was forced to gaze upon my classic pan.

Nearly a week of that, and in our opinion a year of it would have no effect on him. Through Cal Jordon, the adjutant, the story leaked out that Major Berry had pleaded with Tolley to request a transfer from Cook, and that Tell 'Em had refused. He wouldn't run from the bunch that was relegating him to the ashheap—he'd stay and lick 'em.

Four days before Frank Grady left on the trip he wasn't to return from, I was up in a Curtiss with some special streamlining on it, to take it over the mile speed course. The crate made a hundred and eighty, and I came back over Cook Field at about a thousand feet, to play around a little on the way down.

From my right a P. W. came dashing toward me at right angles. Then it circled slightly behind me, and came sliding toward my tail. The head I saw peeking over the side belonged to Tolley.

He came diving at me, and started riding my tail, inching closer and closer. That was one of his favorite stunts. Whenever he caught a ship in the air, he wanted to start a dogfight right away. Whether he did it to grandstand, or merely for the pure joy of fast flying, I don't know. Anyhow, if a man didn't feel like indulging in a little contest to see which could ride the other down, it was a —— nuisance to have another ship diving at him all the time, ruining his own chance to do the kind of flying he wanted to.

I felt like a bit of a stunt ride, for two or three minutes, so I paid no attention to Tolley. His scout was within ten feet of mine, and there wasn't as much space between us as there is between taxis in Chicago. I didn't dare make a move for fear of a collision as his left wing crept up until the tip of it was within three feet of my cockpit, and his prop whirling within inches, it seemed, of my right wing. He was a beautiful formation flyer, without question, but I craved no close quarters.

I waved him away, but he didn't make a move. Then, with a sort of scornful flip of the tail, the ship zoomed upward, hung in a reenversement, and a moment later was diving at me again. Before I could start my own little ride, he was creeping up on me again. This time he got slightly above me, his left wing almost over my right one.

We were almost over the river which rims the southern end of the field. As my ship, in the lead, got over the trees and water the downward current which is always present above water caught me, and my ship dropped about fifty feet. A split second later it caught his ship, and it dropped too.

And it dropped a bit further than mine. Before I could make a move my scout trembled to the crash. His propellor just threshed through my tail surfaces as though they'd been so much tissue paper. As the nose of my ship flipped downward, Tell 'Em tried to wrench his scout to the right, and his left wing locked with the shattered mass of elevators, stabilizers, and rudder which his prop had made.

There was only one thing to do. Cursing wrathfully, I unsnapped my belt and got to my feet as the two connected ships started their dipping, diving fall. With one hand in the ripcord ring of my seat-pack 'chute, I steadied myself with the other and got one foot on the edge of the cockpit. The wires were shrieking madly in the drop, and the two wrecks were not on an even keel for a second.

I had to just fall off the spinning aerial raft I was on. How it happened I don't know, exactly—the universe was a whirling hell of noise and numbing fear as far as I was concerned. But I think that one foot caught under the cowling as I fell over the side.

For a second it seemed I hung by it, and then my body, with that foot as a lever, crashed back against the side of my ship. The foot tore loose with a terrific wrench, and such pain that I nearly lost consciousness. My head hit one of the tubular steel struts beneath the linen of the fuselage, and I went by-by.

I must have been out for two or three seconds—maybe more. I'd been slightly less than a thousand feet high when I'd jumped. When my dizzy head came to itself I was falling, end over end, through the air, and for a stunned second the green expanse of Cook Field appeared to be ready to hit me in the face. I'd fallen at least three hundred feet, and four hundred would be closer.

My fumbling fingers found the ripcord ring at my side, and I jerked it. A second later the harness lifted, and my body doubled up with the wrench of the opening 'chute. That wrench informed me, too, that I had a left foot which was one living sore. It felt as though the arch had fallen, and that the foot had been broken in the middle. I couldn't move the toes to save myself, and the pain was nothing to be called enjoyable.

I was swinging in a sickening arc which made my already scrambled brain literally reel. I was dropping at fifteen feet a second underneath my big silk umbrella, and the earth was getting closer every second.

Right then my eyes picked up something. Below me there was an object falling—

It was Tell 'Em Tolley, and as I watched his 'chute opened. It looked as though he was right on the ground—certainly he hadn't been three hundred feet from it. But there he was, swinging dizzily, and I forgot myself as I waited to see how he'd hit. If he should hit the ground when his body was on a down-swing, said body would be shattered as though he'd fallen from fifty or a hundred feet.

But his luck held with him. From my perch—and the running dozens on the ground bore me out later—I could see that his body barely escaped the ground, and was on a slight upward swing. The 'chute and Tolley hit the ground almost parallel, and he landed, on his feet, like a cat.

I didn't see him tear off his 'chute and start running toward where I'd hit. I was too busy dreading what was before me within the next ten seconds. The rate at which you drop in a 'chute doesn't cause you to hit the ground gently, as so many people think. You hit like a ton of brick. I was still swinging—and I'd have to land on that broken foot which was already paining me like a huge sore tooth. It made my flesh creep as I looked forward to it. Many a jumper has broken his leg under the best of conditions—I couldn't take a chance on falling on one foot alone. I'd just have to grin and bear it, but the cold sweat was out on my forehead as I waited.

Fifty feet from the ground I was still swinging. If I could only be as lucky as Tolley—

Then I saw him. He was running lightly along beneath me, as a very gentle breeze carried me across the field. Suddenly he sprinted ahead. To show you what shape I was in, I had scarcely noted the crash of the ships, close to the river. They hadn't caught fire, through some miracle.

He stopped, when I was about twenty feet high. I realized, then, as I swung mildly upward, that I'd hit the ground on the downward arc, which would make the shock that much worse.

But I'd reckoned without the sandy-haired pilot below me. When my feet were four feet from the ground, swinging downward besides, he was on the spot. A dart of exquisite pain went through me as he threw both arms around my knees, striving to stop my downward swing and to lift at the same time.

He broke the fall. My body carried him backward, off his feet, but I felt the strength in his drawn steel muscles as he heaved while he fell. I landed in a heap on top of him, and I was able to put the good foot to the ground first and save my shattered left one.

The next second I was sitting down, trying to hold the crippled leg up as the parachute dragged me a trifle. Tolley lay still—I'd knocked him out.

Rescue was only fifteen feet away, with Tex MacDowell in the van. They had me loose in a second.

"Get an ambulance—I've got a rotten left foot!" I told 'em, and a signal to the line brought the ever-ready ambulance rocking toward us.

"Did Tolley know about your foot?" Tex inquired slowly.

"I don't suppose so," I told him. "But at that—"

"I guess he did," interrupted Redding, his gray eyes afire. "It was plain as day what he did. He jumped a bit after you, and then he deliberately fell, to within three hundred feet of the ground before opening the 'chute. I saw him pull the ripcord ring myself, I tell you. Then he just barely saved himself from having his brains knocked out against the ground, and took off to break your fall. You can't figure anything else!"

The milling group of flyers and mechanics all agreed. They'd seen me dashed against the side of the ship, and figured me temporarily knocked out. But Tolley—it certainly looked as though Redding's tale had been correct. If it was, the youngster had risked his life grandly for me.

He came to in a trice, as I was being lifted in the ambulance.

"Sure, I saw his feet catch—I wasn't ten feet away in my ship. I didn't know he was crippled, but I did see him get knocked cuckoo and figured that he'd pulled the ripcord and would float down unconscious. So I thought I'd better beat him down and try to catch him."

I shall never forget Frank Grady then. The strapping red-headed Irishman—a laughing, fighting, impulsive giant—winked portentously at me.

"Good fellow to collide with," he stated. "And he's traveled faster, and lived to tell the tale, than any man that ever lived!"

Tolley's eyes met mine from ten feet away, over the heads of the others.

"Thanks," I called to him as I settled in the ambulance. "It was—pretty fine, Tolley, and—"

"Never mind the applesauce!" he said tersely, and sudden silence fell over them all.

HEAD thrown back, a dare to the crowd in every line of his body, his eyes flickered cooly into mine. Never was that sort of aura of vibrant energy and vitality more obvious in him.

"I don't think a —— bit more of you and your ways than I ever did," he went on calmly. "And I'd have done just as much for a good dog. And it wasn't a —— of a lot at that. I knew how to figure the 'chute, and how far it'd go. And I don't crave the society of any bozo on this field who didn't want mine before today!"

And he strode off unhurriedly, leaving behind him a somewhat stunned bunch of airmen, including one Slim Evans. I remember thinking to myself:

"He did me a considerable favor, but I don't see that it changes his status as a man, at that. A fool is a fool wherever you put him, and pulling off a death-defying leap doesn't add any to his brain or subtract any from the size of his head!"

But I had to doff my plumed chapeau to him, in a way. There was something sublime about him. If anybody ever had the courage of his convictions, it was Tell 'Em Tolley.

The X-ray showed several torn ligaments in my foot, and ligaments in my foot are bound to be large. The doc said that there would have been an excellent chance for me to have limped the rest of the way through this vale of tears had I landed on said foot. It looked very much as though Tell 'Em had saved me the price of a crutch, and likewise my career, so to speak. in the Air Service.

I laid in bed with it three days, and the last two of them were devoted to reading about the search for Frank Grady and Chick Hawkins. They'd started off for Nashville, Tennessee, for the week-end, and simply disappeared. There'd been a considerable storm over Kentucky, so the search was conducted over the Kentucky mountains.

I was limping on a cane when the news was flashed to us that Chick Hawkins had stumbled into a small town forty miles out of Louisville. Next morning, three hours before Hawkins himself reached the field from Louisville, the morning papers carried the story that Chick had told.

A forced landing, complete wreck, nobody hurt—but they'd fallen into the hands of Luke Haswell and a couple of younger members of the Haswell clan. The Haswells were well and unfavorably known throughout the mountains, particularly Luke. He was a one-eyed outlaw who'd done time for manslaughter before, and was supposed to have killed thirteen of the McVeys.

The two flyers had been kept captive, evidently because Luke wasn't sure just what their business in the mountains was. And they were "Government men." Grady, a fighting fool anyhow, had hatched a plan to escape, and he and Chick had tried it. In the process Grady killed one of the Haswells, and was wounded himself. Chick got away by a miracle—and without a weapon of any kind, as helpless as a kitten, he'd watched what happened, before starting his long trek to civilization.

Under Luke's leadership they'd strung Grady up to a tree, without even a barrel under him, and while he slowly strangled to death Luke had conducted target-practise on his writhing body.

I scarcely noticed the rest of the story—that the Governor of Kentucky had called out the militia, and had requested a flight of airplanes to do scouting duty while the soldiers combed the mountains. I dragged my foot out to the field with raw murder in my heart, and I found that the section of the Air Service centering at Cook consisted of about twenty pilots who'd have cheerfully lost an arm to string Haswell up and improve their marksmanship on him. White-faced and red-eyed and cursing, some of them with tears in their eyes as they talked, they mobbed the C. O.'s office, begging to fly over the mountains with their fingers on their machine gun controls.

Major Berry had talked to Washington over the phone by the time Chick got in. The slim young pilot was a haggard, bearded wreck, and there was a sob in his voice as he raved to the C. O. before us all:

"If they don't get him, by ——, I'll resign from the Army and hunt him down if it takes five years and I have to steal an airplane to do it!"

"We'll get him," Major Berry told him grimly, and then cast his eyes over the crowd on the sidelines.

"Evans! MacDowell! Adams! Tolley! Report to my office at once!"

My heart did a fast loop. I was still limping, and not on flying duty. But it looked as though there was a chance—

There was. As the tight-lipped C. O. faced us in his office he said in clipped phrases:

"There'll be four more pilots from Wright Field who'll go along. Two weeks from now a flight, as you probably know, was scheduled to go to Camp Henry to conduct two weeks of artillery fire for the regiments coming in for that purpose. This flight will go down there immediately, doing scout duty for the militia, and then remaining to conduct the artillery shoot.

"MacDowell, you're selected because of your border experience. Evans, the same. You'll have to be an observer, of course, with that foot, but I know you border men are up on telegraphy, which most of the pilots aren't. MacDowell, you'll be a pilot for the hunt, and an observer handling artillery fire for the shoot. Two more observers, and two pilots, are coming from Wright.

"Tolley, you're picked because you can do the job and because, being a new man, you're more easily spared from the field than any one else. Adams, you know the mountains well, you told me once—"

"Yes, sir. I was born in Kentucky," the big fellow broke in, his stormy dark eyes glowing softly.

"Very good. Listen, Tolley."

The major centered his gaze on the youngster who was, momentarily, transfigured with eagerness. His face and eyes fairly lit up the office.

"If by word or action you, or any other man, jeopardizes the success of this flight by personal differences, that man'll be a traitor, and if it's in my power I'll court-martial him and do my ——dest to see that he's kicked out of the service like the swine he'll have proved himself to be! Understand?"

"Yes, sir, but I resent it!"

Those words cracked and burnt, I'll tell you, and the pilot seemed two inches taller—and on fire.

"I don't give a —— what you resent, sir! I'm warning you—and the rest!" blazed the major.

A second of oppressive silence when it seemed that something would snap and a real battle ensue, and then the major sat down behind his desk.

"You'll use Douglases, start at noon, and the orders are to get Haswell dead or alive. And don't be too particular. That's all, gentlemen."

It was enough. As I collected my extra shirt and sock to take along I found plenty of time to wonder how things would work out with that little outfit buried in the Kentucky hills for two weeks—and Tolley and Adams both in it. As I've mentioned, Tolley'd been a lone wolf for days, saying nothing, but stalking through his working hours in silent scorn. Adams, now that Tolley wasn't talking or ragging him, had apparently become his old taciturn self—a good fellow, but blunt and individualistic. In his slow way the man was now smouldering with an inner fire which didn't spell any picnic for Luke Haswell if he ever got those big paws on the one-eyed outlaw.

We got started at one o'clock, flying four big Douglas planes. The same type ships as were on the round-the-world flight. They were the new observation ships to replace De Havilands, and there was as much difference in flying the two crates as there would be between driving a pasteboard car and one of those big babies in the five thousand dollar class. Taking the place—eventually, anyway—of the frail, old, obsolete, rebuilt De Havilands, we had big sturdy ships that would do a hundred and forty miles an hour and get to 18,000 feet without any supercharger or anything like *that. And driven by the old Liberty* which keeps on going if there's a cylinder left.

We landed at Goddard Field, so-called, on the outskirts of the great deserted Army cantonment which was crumbling into ruin. The field was as much of a flying field as one of those barracks were a human habitation. It was a rough pasture lot set on a slope so steep you had to keep your motor running to keep from going backwards.

Mechanics and a few other soldiers would arrive by train, very late. It was a gray, raw evening, with a hint of rain in the air, and that moldering, deserted camp set at the foot of the slope was no pleasing panorama. Captain Atwood, a good scout who'd served with me down at the Mechanics School in Texas, was C. O. of the flight, and he sent Tolley scouting out on the road for a car to drive him into the nearest town, seven miles away, after food. We ate a cold supper, and then sat and shivered and talked while the wind and rain beat around the leaking barracks across the road from the hangars and flying field.

Tolley, while plainly excited at the service ahead, nevertheless maintained his pose of icy, contemptuous aloofness. He ate his meal in complete silence, Adams' brooding dark eyes on him most of the time, and then got up and went to bed in one of the rooms upstairs. We had to sleep on our blankets.

"So that's the way it is," commented the tall, well-set up C. O. "Either a feast or a famine of talking where the infant wonder's concerned."

"Funny part of it is," drawled Tex, "that this youthful martyrdom really isn't that at all, with him. He don't care whether anybody speaks to him or not, I'll swear, nor is he backward about telling 'em the same. He'll answer everybody but Atom and Slim, and those he wouldn't stoop to."

"Well, it isn't pleasant," remarked Adams, and it wasn't.

It was dreary enough, anyway, without a skeleton at the feast. And no one could mistake the feeling which Tell 'Em had.

"Tell you what, Slim," the C. O. said finally. "I'm going to have you fly with Tolley. According to the letter of the law, you can't handle a stick on account of your foot. But if he gets crazy or anything, or seems to be using crazy judgment, make up your own mind and to —— with regulations."

Which was spoken like an Air Service officer and a gentleman.

"You, Adams," went on the Captain, "might make some advances to him, eh? See if we can't clean the matter up, and make a man out of him instead of a spoiled pup—"

"Which has got the bark and the bite of a real dog, too young," Tex interjected.

Adams, bulking hugely in his chair, shook his shaggy head.

"I got nothing against him when he keeps his mouth shut," he said doggedly. "But honest, Cap'n, after he got on my nerves and I commenced to shut him up, there isn't a name ever heard of in the best muleskinner circles he hasn't called me. I've licked him till my fists were raw. And by ——, he makes the first move—which he never will!"

That was that. And as I went through the process I dignify by the title of thought, I had a secret hunch that old Atom was nearer right than he knew. Any deference to the football hero, the flying star, and the savior of Slim Evans' flat left foot would be seized on by Tell 'Em as an admission that we were apologizing.

IT WAS a raw, wet, cold night and I slept very little. The wind whistled through the chinks in the walls and the broken panes in the windows, and the camp, isolated under the best of conditions, seemed like an island in the middle of the sea.

We all were glad to get up at four-thirty, when a wan gray dawn arrived mournfully. A cook had come with the mechanics, and the rotting mess-hall's leaning smokestack was belching some of the said vapor. As we trooped out the side door toward it, I noticed a piece of paper nailed to the jam.

"First mail delivery," I remarked, and looked at it casually. Then not so casually.

"Don't try to fly over the mountains looking for Luke Haswell," it ran, and the writing was fair and the spelling perfect. "If you fly one day even, look out. He's got plenty of friends that'll stick by him."

It was written in pencil, unsigned. And somebody had sneaked up during the night and pinned it there. The foothills of the mountains were within three or four miles of the camp, and the country between was practically deserted. The Government had bought and wiped out a village to make

Camp Henry, thirty miles from Louisville.

We got a bit of a laugh out of it, there in the daylight, although I could see by the flaming Tolley's face that the youngster was dramatizing it. That night, however, after a whole day of continuous, and fruitless, scouting over the wildest stretches of the Kentucky mountains, we began to wonder a little. It was drizzling again as we ate by candlelight in one corner of the damp mess-hall. Tolley didn't say a word, and provided an efficient wet blanket.

As we came out and looked down the slope at the folorn encampment, I said:

"Those miles of shacks could hide all the people in the mountains this very night. The guards hadn't better take that note as a joke!"

"You're —— right," enunciated Atom Adams with considerable clarity. "I know these mountains, and in my opinion the fact that the note was nailed to the door at all means that the Haswells mean business. Not the Haswells, necessarily—but some of their allies like the Hasletts or the Bardins."

I'm not an emotional sort, I don't believe, nor do shadows scare me. But with the shadow of Frank Grady's death hanging over us, and the inevitable effect of Tolley's attitude and the patent hatred between him and Adams always before us, plus that dismal, shadowed, lonesome panorama—well, one Slim Evans didn't feel so —— happy.

It was pitch dark, or nearly so. We could just see the vague bulk of the four corrugated-iron hangars across the road from us—beyond, there was the field, and at the foot of it that far-stretching mass of moldering shacks—enough to hold sixty thousand men. And all around us the mountains. The rain pattered on the iron walls of the hangars, and I never wanted a drink so bad in my life.

We strayed over to the barracks, and Tell 'Em, as usual, went off upstairs. Pike, a stocky chap from Wright Field who was acting as one of the observers, gazed out the window and said:

"These mountaineers are worse scared of airplanes than a fly is of a spider. Boy, I'll never forget that time I was held for four days up in Sterling. Shouldn't wonder if they meant business."

"Well, they can't do much, but we might as well keep our guns handy," stated Adams.

We had three enlisted men guarding the hangar that housed our ships, two more around the barracks, and the officers were to take shifts as O. D. Mine started at two o'clock in the morning, that very night, and on the morrow Tolley and I were to be reserve men—stay at the field waiting to substitute for any ship that went bad, or to answer a hurry radio call. We'd set up a field radio set.

That reminded me of something, and I went plowing up the stairs to find Tolley. He was laying in bed, in pajamas and bathrobe, reading—Nietzsche.

All I knew about that bird was that he was a German who wrote something about the superman, and justified ruthlessness on the part of the upper segments of manhood. But somehow it seemed funny to think of that slim, dapper, iron kid being so all-fired intellectual, even if he had been head of his class at West Point.

He looked at me, and waited. We hadn't exchanged four words in days.

"Listen ,Tolley," I started with my customary elegance and *éclat*. "Today when you took off you did a chandelle off the ground, coming back from our second patrol you hedge-hopped over the mountains and cañons, and in general you treated the Douglas in a very frolicsome manner."

"Well, what of it?" he inquired.

"Just this," I returned with some asperity and not a little spleen. "It's hard enough on me to have to trust my neck to anybody else, to say nothing of a two-hundred-hour man, even if you are a good flyer. From now on, please fly straight and level, with no monkeyshines. We've got a job to do, and trick flying isn't in it!"

"Who's pilot?" he enquired.

"You are," I told him. "But—"

"Then I'll run the ship," he announced. "Just the way I feel like. What are you going to do about it?"

"I'm going to carry a length of iron pipe," I told him grimly, "and the first time you start kicking up your heels I'm going to caress you with a crack on the conk. Then I'll fly, and you can send your opinions through military channels!"

He landed on his feet as though every bedspring had uncoiled and shot him there.

"You will, eh?" he snapped. "Boy, you try!"

"Right. I will. Don't go into any theatricals. I'm not arguing—I'm telling you!"

For a moment he stood there, in his characteristic attitude. Head back, nostrils trembling, hair and eyes throwing off sparks, body aquiver with suppressed energy and the spirit of him shining through. Then his mouth widened in a scornful smile that was half snarl and half sneer, and he dropped on the bed.

"That all?" he inquired.

"Every bit of it," I told him. "Thanks for talking to me."

And off I went downstairs while he returned to his studies. I'd made no more impression on him than a fly colliding with Gibraltar, I knew. But I'd make one if he did any more flying feroics, if there be such a word.

The time dragged downstairs—we were cold, with nothing to read, and not a drink in the shack. I wasn't going to bed before taking O. D., and the rest had no reason to. We put down the shades to try to keep a little of the breeze out, and talked mountain stuff. Even Atom Adams was constrained to say something occasionally, and he told us some bloodthirsty yarns of the hills.

"By the way," remarked Tex in his slow southern speech, "I don't envy those militiamen camping out in the tall grass this evening. They must be as comfortable as a barefoot dancer in Death Valley on the 4th of July—"

CRASH! The sound of breaking glass mingled, all at once, with the rip of the curtain and a thud.

I jumped higher than an antelope off a spring board, and Pike beat me. There was the bullet-hole in the wall. The Haswells were at work.

We each had two Colts on us or near-by. In a flurry of oaths and footsteps we tore out into the night, and then Adams brought us to ourselves as we peered warily into the dense darkness. Not a guard knew anything. Somewhere in the inky shadows a marksman lurked, or had—and he'd sent a warning message.

"A real attack wouldn't have been foreshadowed by a wild shot through the window-shade. It's just an advance *billet doux*. No reason for excitement," stated the skipper.

Which seems to have some sense to it, at that. I prowled around by the window, keeping low to avoid having my head outlined against the light, and —— if there wasn't something white there.

I got it, and we went inside. We weren't kids—I've spent nights riding herd, and stranded in the Big Bend of Texas, but it made me cakewalk a bit to think of one of those mountaineers crawling right up to our window.

"Think it over!"

That was what the note said—the alpha and omega of same.

"Well I'll be ——!" swore the strapping C. O. "This thing must have brought on a real mountain war, if the Haswells are going this far!"

"Listen, Cap," came Adams' heavy voice. The big fellow was crouched like a big bear on the edge of his chair, his black hair in wild disarray and his eyes glowing beneath their husky black brows. "We can't fight 'em with what we got. We'll get through tonight O.K., maybe. But forty men may be skulking around that deserted village down there—or will be, tomorrow night, to keep these airplanes out of the air. We ought to have help."

Say what you please, Slim Evans agreed heartily. I wouldn't have objected to the whole army, in fact. You can't fight what you can't see, and I felt as though a pack of wolves was sitting just outside my line of vision, and me without a match.

It was decided to call on the governor next day for at least a company of the national guard. I went on as O. D., and it wasn't comfortable, even after the rain stopped. At dawn, of course, the old ghostly feeling was gone, but I felt pretty well satisfied that the C. O. communicated with the governor before he took off that morning, and that the gentle evenfall would find us with company.

I went to bed, leaving Tolley in charge, and slept until two o'clock. As I staggered forth at that witching hour, finding the sun shining, I saw a Jenny, its motor running, standing on the line. Tolley was talking to somebody alongside it, and a couple of mechanics were hanging around.

As I wandered across the road the tall stranger, dressed in overalls, helmet and goggles, climbed in his ship and taxied up the hill for the take-off. He had a machine gun mounted on a scarfmount in the rear cockpit, from which position he was flying. He was alone.

"A volunteer scout," I thought. "That

machine gun's worth more than the ship. It's a wonder that crate can hold a Lewis up."

It was as battered and worn-out a looking hulk as I've ever seen take the air. It looked as though it had been made out of the remnants of Noah's ark, and was in perfect color harmony with the weather-beaten sides of the buildings.

"Who might that be, and did I scare him?" I asked Tolley, forgetting that he had no desire whatever to talk to me.

"Fellow I knew as an enlisted man in the war," barked Tolley. "He's doing commercial flying. Helping out trying to find Haswell—or's going to. Kentuckian, too—"

"Where the ——'s my machine gun?"

I yapped that one into Tolley's face, and no mistake. The Lewis I'd had on the back seat of the Douglas was gone, scarf-mount and all.

"I gave it to Baldwin," returned Tolley, that supercilious smile on his face.

"You —— fool—you muling and puking kid!" I raged. "Who gave you authority to give away anything—"

"Nobody, of course. But he needed it. I've got the Marlins geared to shoot through the propellor—"

"Great ——!"

I couldn't talk, for a second, and when I can't talk I'm either sick or about to make somebody else so.

"I suppose you think it's a cinch to dive a two-ton ship around cañons to aim guns! You big-headed ass, what do you suppose we've got back-seat guns for on these ships? By ——, the time's come when you—"

"When I what?"

Six inches shorter than I, weighing fifty pounds less, that blazing fool just snarled that up into my face. Fifty feet away were the mechanics, watching. And for once in my life I didn't do what I wanted to.

I just turned away, as completely frustrated as you can well imagine. I could have licked the tar out of him, of course, as easily as a steam-roller could crush a caterpillar. But I had the feeling that it wouldn't mean a thing. I might as well land my fist on solid rock. Knock him kicking—and when he came to he'd be just as before. So I, strange to relate, shut up.

I guess I remembered his parachute jump, too.

But the captain didn't, when he heard it at dusk that night. I didn't say anything about it at first—the weary gang had a lot to tell. Adams had found a landing field, where he'd conferred with the colonel in charge of the ground troops. They had a good idea where Luke Haswell must be, and the dope from his mountain enemies was that he had only one man with him—Zeke Haswell, who'd helped him kill Frank Grady. However, the other Haswells and a couple of dozen allies were on watch, ready to fight when the time came, and the whole mountain country was seething. Their hatred of the law was such that the demonstration of what the Government really could do had turned them into cornered rats—so scared that they'd fight blindly.

But in a dozen larger towns around the fringe of the hill country there were hundreds of men ready to join in and surround Luke as soon as he was accurately located. Every road was picketed already. However, Luke had nearly forty square miles to range in before he had to dive out into open and enemy territory. But somewhere, from a few mountain people's dope, between Cripple Creek and the Shaver River, in the most inaccesible part of the mountain country, Luke was hiding. And his allies were distributed on crucial cliffs, so to speak, to guard him.

Our sentries were not yet at the camp, although they were supposed to be on the way, and that didn't make the weary flyers feel any better as night fell.

I waited until dinner was over, and we were huddled in one large room in the barracks.

"Come in, Tolley," I told him as we filed into the room and he started upstairs.

He knew what was up, and came.

I told the Cap what had happened, and the overwrought C. O. hit the ceiling.

"You're not only an ass, sir, but you're a rotten officer!" he concluded. "A strange flyer drops in, and goes off with a machine gun that you gave him! A gun that may be used against us, for all you know! Without authority—"

"I knew the man—"

"Keep still until you're told to talk! Knew him—yes. What did you know about him? His name, that's all, and his face. What authority did you have—"

"Oh, I suppose I should have put it through military channels!"

It was a sneer—a contemptous gauntlet flung to his C. O. And that second the captain became an iceberg.

"That's just going to cost you a court martial, and a dismissal from the service, by ——!" he said slowly.

"Because I cut a little red tape to help out the hunt for Haswell, and got another ship in the air!" blazed the unconquered Tolley. "Great ——, this —— Army —"

"Shut up!"

It was the old, infuriated roar of Atom Adams.

"Make me!"

Tolley almost whispered that, and his eyes went from Adams' to the captain's. And without a word being spoken directly to the C. O., every one knew the dare had been flung into the teeth of the captain, as well as Adams.

And there in that little room, with nothing but silent darkness around a group of frayed-nerved airmen, I'll swear there was murder in the air if ever I felt it. It was unnatural—horrible.

Silence that seemed endless, and then Tolley, his mouth twisted into a derisive sneer, broke it.

"Court martial me, and I'll beat the case. You—"

"Shut up!"

A human tiger launched himself at Adams. Because of what was in the air, and because we knew that Tolley had ruined himself as an Army man forever—and deserved it—no one interfered. I guess they all felt as I did—just all fed up. And we saw Tolley beaten to a pulp again.

We'd barely got him to bed when the national guardsmen arrived, and an hour thereafter we were all in bed.

Next morning Tolley seemed the same as ever, outwardly. He came into the mess-hall last, and his eyes swept the table with the same haughtiness. But somehow I sensed in him something new—and there peeped forth from his sunken eyes something that was wild and hot—not cool and superior and coldly contemptuous.

As we stood beside the big Douglas, with the Liberty roaring along wide open and the dust swirling in a cloud as the ship strained against the blocks, I showed Tolley my iron pipe.

"Remember," I told him, and as he just looked and turned away I suddenly, despite his snort of derision, felt sorry for him. Somehow, during my knocking around, from a cowhand in Utah through all the ups and downs that followed, I've never found anybody altogether good or altogether bad, and I guess I've got sort of tolerant.

Anyhow, for the moment, Tolley, —— bent for destruction as he was, seemed to me like some vibrant, fiery young eagle dashing itself against the bars that held it captive, killing itself inevitably. Sounds like a —— poet, but you get what I mean.

As I strapped myself in the back seat, my iron pipe felt comfortable. Nothing like 'em, especially for green cadets that go berserk and freeze the controls or something like that. Joe Le Fere, an old instructor of mine, used to wear out two a week. He was sort of nervous, being a Frenchman and an acrobatic instructor.

We roared down the slope, and as we got off behind the captain, Tell 'Em held the two-ton plane close to the ground, and then zoomed. It was just half way between something I didn't want and something that was all right.

However, the forty miles to our sector of patrol was made in the good old-fashioned straight and level way, and I forgot his flying as I looked over that limitless panorama of wooded hills and deep-cut ravines and occasional scraggly cabins. Then, as we got close to Cripple Creek, and we saw the far-flung line of militia clambering laboriously along, combing the woods, I settled down to close observation. There were other crawling humans down there, visible hither and yon through the trees. Perhaps mountaineers, perhaps civilian volunteers. At first it looked so uninhabited and peaceful—then, as one picked out the host of men, it changed. Somehow I thought of a mass of maggots crawling over a huge corpse. Thinking of the history of those blood-soaked hills, and of some of those, such as Luke Haswell, who lurked in their recesses, the simile didn't seem far-fetched.

Miles away on either side were the other ships—Atom Adams to our left, Pike and Winfield, another Wright man, to our right. The captain and Tex MacDowell, with their observers, were on the flanks, many miles away.

I watched the country closely. The only dope we had on Haswell was that he was very tall, bearded, totally bald, and had a jagged scar on the top of his head. Likewise, that his head might be exposed, for he hadn't worn a hat during Chick Hawkins' acquaintance with him.

Of course, there was little chance of our picking him up—he'd doubtless play possum while ships were overhead, unless his pursuers were so close on his trail that he had to keep on the move.

And five minutes later, as I noticed something moving down below, I figured there might be a chance of just that.

Winding crookedly along below steep cliffs and banks was a gorge. And through my field glasses I caught a movement—something had crossed a slight open space between two patches of undergrowth along the tiny brook. A moment later two more had dived across, and then the three were hard to follow. Almost impossible, in fact. All I could do was notice a slight movement in the bushes, although we were only a thousand feet high. Three men, in that territory, five miles ahead of the militia—and trying to hide—

I put my head up to touch Tolley and get him to go low, when something just appeared and hit me in the eye. It was that Jenny, less than a half mile away, and coming toward us diagonally.

Maybe it was the shock of it, but suddenly the vague forebodings of which I'd been conscious all came back in full force. I hadn't had time, really, to think much about that lost gun, but there was a possibility there which the C. O., too, had thought of. The stranger was a Kentuckian, and had learned to fly a little bit while in the Air Service. If he should just happen to be an ally of the Haswells, and had rushed out and got hold of some old commercial ship—

It was fantastic, all right. And the nerve of it would be superb, in a way. Not that the scheme was one, on the surface, to arouse suspicion in an Army heart, either. But a man could stay up there, close to where he knew Luke was, and knock off a ship that spotted him. Then the fall and a fire to remove all suspicion that it wasn't just a broken control-wire or something of the sort.

Of course, I didn't really believe it. But nevertheless I watched the Jenny as it came ever closer on its intersecting course. In a moment it was only a hundred yards from us, and looked as though it would pass about fifty feet over our heads, and about that far behind us.

I watched him, to see what he wanted if nothing else. And, as though by instinct, my hand touched the stick.

A few seconds later he was crossing our trail, less than fifty feet behind us. My ostrich-like neck was craned around to see if any signal came from him—

It did. I saw his hand on the handle of the Lewis, and the gun was pointed at us. He waited a second, until his ship should be directly behind us, giving him a perfect position from which to rake us with fire—and that second, with all my strength, I thrust forward on the stick and jammed on full right rudder. As the Douglas went into its steep spiral I saw his guns spit fire—but he missed.

As his slow ship banked around for another shot Tolley's contorted face was turned toward me, and I felt the stick being taken from me. The shock of my maneuvers had temporarily torn the controls from Tolley—and he was sore.

Wildly I pointed upward—and then dared to cut the throttle and yell!

"He shot at us! Get him!"

And all I got was a blank stare. Later he said that he didn't hear what I said, or come close to comprehending. He'd thought I was scared of a collision.

FOR a second I fought for the stick—and that crazy youngster wouldn't let me have it. All this had given the Jenny a chance to maneuver close to us, and above us. It could catch us and shoot again—and our guns were in front!

It didn't take me a second to decide. Tolley's head turned back to the front as I released the controls—then my pipe hit his helmeted head with force which should have cracked it. I wasn't normal—not with sudden death roaring toward us.

As Tolley went limp I grabbed the stick, and dived the Douglas plenty. In a moment, due to our hundred and seventy miles an hour speed, we were temporarily out of danger. Then I started to climb, with the twelve-cylinder Liberty roaring wide open.

It was a ninety miles an hour ship against one that would do one-forty, and it didn't take much flying to keep out of the Jenny's way. It turned tail, and started to flee as the stranger saw I was wise. But I was on its trail, gaining while I climbed. It was heading over toward Adams' ship, which seemed to be coming toward us. Then Baldwin switched his course again and started south.

I didn't know just what to do. An

armed ship, fighting for the mountaineers, wasn't anything to let go—it might, in sheer revenge, get one of the other Army ships. The pilot must have noticed me peering down at the ground with great intentness and, knowing that Luke was there, figured that we'd spotted him. I'd been so busy with the ground the Jenny might have been above us all the time—

Then I decided. There was no way to get at the guns in the front seat. The Douglas had an all-metal prop that nothing, practically, could break—and if worst came to worst, there were the parachutes. Coming from the rear, our motor would be our shield against his bullets, providing the lone champion of the mountains could shoot accurately at a ship coming on his tail.

I'd run into him, if necessary. I couldn't lose sight of Haswell, or whoever it was down there, too soon, or he'd get away—and I couldn't let that deadly, because unknown, menace ahead range freely and shoot down the unsuspecting army ships.

I paid the unknown, from what little I knew of him, the compliment of believing that he'd shoot his wad without thought of consequences.

I was in position, now, a hundred yards back of him and a hundred feet higher. With luck, I could get up on him and chew his tail controls off with my prop. The worst he could do would be to spring a leak in our radiator with his bullets. Then I'd have to make tracks back as far as I could go before landing on one of the few cleared spots.

I was diving for him, full tilt, my head over the side. I saw him, twisted in his seat, long thin face beneath sparkling goggles—

Just as Tolley came to I changed my mind. I couldn't do it. That unknown, awkward pilot ahead, flying his mangy, rattletrap, limping old Jenny, who'd strolled into camp and got his gun from under our noses—I liked the son-of-a-gun without knowing him. I had my guns now—I could force Tolley to shoot that staggering old wreck and its audacious pilot—but I wouldn't.

Just as Tolley, after a quick look at me, bent forward, I nosed up to offset the chance that Tell 'Em might grasp the situation and shoot. For three minutes I watched the Jenny leg it on southward, away from any of our ships, while I unwound my radio antenna.

He knew he was licked. And while I tapped my key, telling the radio sergeant at Goddard Field to phone Louisville and have the alarm broadcast to pick him up, I mentally got on my hind legs and made that flying mountaineer a sincere obeisance. And I hoped to God he'd get away. I might as well come clean—he did.

When I finished—Tolley was flying now—I cut the throttle, and yelled into his ear:

"Three men up the gorge here—may be Haswell—fly up, low, about two miles!"

For the first time, I noticed his face and eyes. He'd tumbled to what had happened. And suddenly I realized that he was broken—and why. Not only facing a court martial—but destined to live in the history of the Air Service as the man who'd given the enemy the ammunition which had come within a whisper of killing at least two, and probably more, flyers. And he'd fought to the last to give Baldwin a chance to do it!

No wonder his face was drawn, and his eyes glowing madly behind his goggles. The always-right, the never-beaten, had ridden to his fall—and great was the fall thereof.

However, I couldn't take too long to think of that. One quick look to make sure the Jenny was nowhere in sight, and then my optics focussed on the ground as the Douglas roared up through the gorge. We were at the place, now—

And there they were. Deep in the bushes, but at a hundred feet I spotted 'em, and so did Tolley, for he climbed high enough to make a turn, and banked around. At the same moment, another Douglas appeared on the scene to find out what it was all about. No. 4—Atom Adams.

Just as we started back, the three men below came out into the open—and they came running. A fifty-yard stretch of clearing—and just as we got there, they dived under an overhanging cliff, safe from our machine-gun bullets.

And there was no way to be sure that Luke Haswell was one of them. If they'd only stay there until the troops came on, all would be hunky-dory. Then we could find out.

But they didn't. Just why, I don't know. Probably they were keen enough to know that they couldn't be identified from the air, and that their unknown pursuers wouldn't shoot without being sure. In any event, if they were Haswells, they were gone goslings when the troops arrived, and machine-gun bullets would be just as merciful—and quicker, maybe.

So they pushed rapidly down the gorge, making no attempt at concealment.

It was a whale of a situation. One was tall and thin, all right, but he wore a hat. And a beard meant nothing—most of the mountaineers wore beards. And I couldn't figure shooting them as being anything but murder, under the circumstances.

However, we could pen them in—shoot ahead of them and make them stop and wait. There was too much chance of their escaping by some means, if we had to wait for them to be caught on the ground. Just to lose them for half an hour would be all that was necessary to give them a chance.

But I never had an opportunity to impart my opinions to the crazy, reckless, thoughtless youngster in the front seat. I looked up to find him standing up in his cockpit, holding the stick behind him as he faced me.

He cut the gun and yelled:

"If I wave to you, it's Haswell!"

Before I could commence to come to, he was up on the seat. As I grabbed the stick—the ship had lost speed with the throttle off, of course—he pulled the ripcord ring, I ducked just in time. The 'chute whisked him off in a split-second—and he was swinging downward, with only the narrow margins of the brook as landing places—and rocks and cliffs and trees everywhere else.

To say that I was overwhelmed is like saying that the late war was a good game. Never to my dying day will I forget his face during that second before he jumped. Somehow it was like that of another person. Eyes flashing wildly—and yet with something shrinking and bewildered in them. Handsome face haggard and drawn—a man gone wild, and wondering just what incomprehensible disaster had overtaken him.

That jump was an act of utterly reckless, unthinking courage. Almost certain injury when he landed, to start with. But even granting a safe landing, he was going down into the woods, in all probability against three desperate outlaws who were at home in the forest. And, although I hadn't had time to look, it was as close to a cinch as ever happened that there were, lurking here and there, a dozen allies of Luke Haswell. It was like leaping down into a collection of cobras.

And all so useless! Whether he lived, or whether he died, the tale would go on among the hard-boiled veterans of the Air Service who'd seen the border patrol of France or any one of a number of emergencies. I could fairly see and hear the unregenerated bunch, detailing the history of Tell 'Em Tolley. They'd be saying with ribald laughter:

"And then to cap it off, instead of penning these birds up with a machine-gun barrage until the troops got there to find out what was what, the —— fool makes a parachute jump in the mountains, with a strip of rocks to land on, or the trees, and a bunch of wild mountaineers on all sides of him, anyway! Cuckoo!"

And, of course, when he had time to think, if he lived, he'd realize it. Just wild impulsiveness, lack of experience in the air—and add the same iron nerve which had allowed him to tumble the air to save me at Cook, and an insane desire to do something, anything, to partially wipe out the bone he'd pulled when he let that machine gun go.

But, boiled down, it was sublime, somehow—duty, even if a crazed sense of duty, in the face of certain death.

It only took a few seconds for him to come down, but it was an eternity to me. He scraped the tips of some overhanging trees, and his luck held good. I'm —— if he didn't light on a strip of sand alongside the brook, and cut loose his parachute before he'd been dragged a foot.

Atom Adams was close to me, but I had no time for him, although I did wonder briefly what he was thinking, if he was able to think at the moment. I was looking for our three prospective victims, a half mile up the gorge. I soon spotted 'em, but now they were in the bushes. In a moment they disappeared under a sheltering bank which had a slight overhang—enough to shield them from us.

Tolley was working his way up the gorge on the dead run. As he rounded a slight turn in it, he slowed down, and a moment later took to the shelter of the undergrowth. I could see both Colts all ready in his hands as I flew the Douglas up and down that narrow ravine. In some places, where mere mountain slopes rose from the stream, it was two hundred feet wide at an altitude of a hundred feet above the water, but where the cliffs were it was often only a hundred or so.

Both Adams and I waited to see what would happen, when one of us should have beat it back to give the signal to the troops.

The three unknowns we were trying to identify were still under their bank—and that made me certain that Luke Haswell was one of them. That 'chute jump had been the final clincher, I figured, proving that they were known and that their time had come. So they'd decided to sell their lives as dearly as possible.

No sooner had Tolley, trying to screen his movements behind the undergrowth, come within rifle shot than wisps of smoke commenced to drift from under that bank. Tolley lay still on the ground—but I thought I could see their shots ruffling the bushes within inches of him. And I came down to an altitude of ten feet to watch. Most mountaineers can crease a mosquito's neck at a hundred yards—

I looked around just in time to see the greatest piece of flying I've ever looked at—Atom Adams, one of the best big ship pilots in the world, at the stick, saving the life of the man I knew he hated.

That great Douglas came roaring down the slope opposite the cave wherein the Haswells had taken shelter, so close to the trees that the undercarriage was scraping them. There he held it, leveling out just above the brook, with not an inch to spare. And his guns spat fire for a second—he was coming toward the cave at a slight angle.

Just for a second—but I held my breath. A two-ton ship—a sheer bank ahead, and nearly two hundred miles an hour for speed. And less than two hundred feet to work in.

Then the Douglas seemed to stand on its tail, not twenty feet above the creek, and to go into a vertical bank at the same time. It mushed, of course. I was above it then, and I take my oath that the wheels didn't escape that perpendicular slope by more than three feet.

But they didn't hit it, and the big plane was hanging on a wing. As it settled, it straightened. It came level so close to the water that I felt certain it would crash—but it didn't. A moment later, and it was roaring up the gorge.

No more smoke rose lazily from beneath the overhanging bank.

Any —— fool can do stunts—that's flying!

* * *

ADAMS came up alongside me, and I motioned him back toward the troops, now less than three miles away. I kept watch for any movements below, while Adams disappeared to give the signal. I kept circling, while above me two more Douglases waited. Both had seen something of what had happened, and come over to investigate. Adams' low zoom over the line of militia would give them, as well as the militia, the news that we thought we had Luke Haswell spotted.

Three quarters of an hour more, to allow the ground force to get there, and then the planes lit out for Goddard Field. The twenty-five minute trip, as far as I was concerned, was a very long one. Somehow I could see Tolley's tormented face dancing before me all the way. I hoped he hadn't realized, already, that his jump would never go down in Air Service annals as the stunt of a hero—but as the most colossal bone a flyer ever pulled.

As I may have remarked before, sometimes I'm tender-hearted as ——. So when I told the full story to the bunch about one second after we landed, I ended with a suggestion.

"Cap," I said, "unless I'm going blind, that fellow's just a rambling wreck right now. It's all hit him at once. He's never been down and out before—but he knows he'll be the laugh of the Air Service now. How about giving him another chance?"

I went into a little more detail—I could describe every line in his face as I'd seen it—and the hilarious cachinations were sort of smothered. Adams, by the way, hadn't laughed at all. And that final desperate, dumb, superb jump—

"That was partly because he was half crazy to redeem himself," I made final conclusion, "but—"

"Mostly because he's got the nerve of the devil himself—and no sense," rumbled Adams.

The C. O. ruminated for a moment.

"Let's wait and see whether he's the wreck you think he is," he said finally. "Personally, I imagine he'll come in proud of himself, and expect to be a hero!"

Eight hours intervened between that statement and the time Tell 'Em got in, and he was the subject of an almost continual discussion during that time. And the rough and ready psychologists of the Air

Service there assembled finally agreed on one thing, at least. Which was, that if Tolley was in the shape I thought he was, it wasn't because he looked forward to being a laughing stock. It was because he had, all of a sudden, found out that he wasn't infallible; that only luck keeps a man from a disastrous mistake some time or other; and that the bigger they are the farther they fall.

And Atom Adams, shaggy and blunt and taciturn, confessed something about half an hour before he arrived. He got it out with more difficulty than Coolidge has saying "no."

"I want to tell you all—one thing," he said slowly, choosing every word. "You can't fool me. We all kind of—admire the son-of-a-gun, for his guts if for nothing else. And I been riding him lots, and licking him. I did it, if you get me, because it worried me to see a guy with all the stuff he's got on the ball, ruining it because of —— foolishness. That's what got on my nerves, and I was trying to pound it out of him. If this hasn't done it, he's just an incurable nut—and —well, he oughta be killed!"

A little later—it was after dark—in came Tell 'Em Tolley, in person. For a minute I was scared to death. I was afraid he'd go on upstairs, avoiding us. That would mean he was ruined—the living flame only a charred stick.

But he came in, and, as always, it seemed that something electric had surcharged the air with energy. I could see that he was taut as rubber stretched to its limit.

His face looked five years older, and in the light in his eyes there was something haunting. A kid, wondering what it was all about—

"Well, Tolley, aren't so sure of yourself I hope," the C. O. started on him, and I writhed mentally to see the necessary torture go on. "A mountaineer put one over on the pride of the Point, and even when his gun was pointed at you you didn't tumble! Then you try to kill yourself under the misapprehension that you had no machine guns on your ship—or that they're there, perhaps, for decorative purposes."

That head came back, and the tortured eyes never wavered before his tormentors. Hair parted exactly in the middle, mouth thin and grim and strained, rocking on his feet, yet he stood the gaff.

There was more, as the captain probed him. And he never said a word. But I knew, and I was sure all the rest did, that he'd never again be the same.

And the C. O., after that wicked lesson before us all, finally came to the point.

"Tolley, the boys have decided that because you were a spoiled baby accidentally inhabiting a pretty fairly athletic body, you deserve another chance to show that you're a man and not a conceited kid who's always had too much gravy. So, every man is pledged to secrecy, if I say the word, about the colossal mistakes you've made on this trip.

"And as far as I'm concerned, I'll withhold the charges for insubordination—for a while. See whether your diapers are gone forever."

Then the skipper got to his feet and stuck out his hand.

"We all have to learn, boy," he said slowly, "and you've been harder to teach than most."

Tolley seemed straighter than ever as he took the hand and his head snapped back even farther. For a second the old man came back—

"I'm not asking for any —— favors," he started—and then quit.

A bewildered, stunned boy stumbled out of the room, and I swear I thought he had his tail between his legs for good.

But he wasn't. Before the artillery shoot was over he was himself again. The bunch gave him neither sympathy nor razzing—just acted natural, and finally kidded him a little. By that time he could take it. The difference in him was merely that between saying: "This is so," and "I think this is so."

And since that time, brethren, he's done things without their swelling his head any. One of the flights in which he took part will be noted in various almanacs a hundred years from now, and he's what might be called well and favorably known in the Air Service. Aside from his engineering brains, flyers come as good as he, but not any better, now that he's got a few hundred more hours and believes he's still got something to learn.

Just a couple of months ago Tex MacDowell and I were stranded in Terrible Haute, Indiana, due to a busted crankshaft. We had occasion to take a few refreshing quaffs, and got to philosophizing about life in general and Tell 'Em Tolley in particular.

At seven in the morning we reached the conclusion that self-confidence is only a cocktail made out of straight conceit with a dash of defeat.

We also reached another conclusion. Or I did anyway. Tex is quite a guy in his own right, taking it by and large. But I'm glad that I'm just old Slim Evans with no mental problems, ambitions, or peculiarities. I'm tickled to death that I can drift along without any desire to accomplish anything, thus avoiding worrying because I don't. Another day another dollar, another dollar another drink, finally some day the big dive anyway, so what the ——.

You tell 'em, as Tolley never says any more.

WAMPUM

by Raymond W. Thorp

As IS generally known, wampum was a sort of Indian money or means of exchange among the tribes encountered by the early colonists along the Atlantic seaboard, and for a considerable distance inland. The term itself is derived from an Algonquian word and referred to small shell beads of two kinds or descriptions, the difference in the two lying in the color, one sort being white and the other violet. The violet beads are nearly always referred to as "black" wampum by historians. They were all made in a cylindrical form, averaging about one-eighth of an inch in diameter and one-fourth inch in length. Most of these beads were bored in the center and placed upon strings, some of which were afterwards woven into bracelets, girdles and the like, and passed among the savages the same as gold and silver among the civilized peoples. Very little wampum was carried in its loose form, the single strings being about the smallest unit of value, and that according to length, as a matter of course. The "black" sort was the most valuable, and was worth, according to measure, ten shillings per fathom; while the white was worth only half that sum, probably owing to the fact that the former was made from a certain grade of shell, while the latter was a product made from various shells.

The bracelets were next highest in value above the single strings, and were made about nine inches long, woven in stripes of "black" and white, six pieces in a row, the warp consisting of leather thongs and the woof of thread. The bracelets were generally worn by the squaws, wrapped twice or three times about the wrist.

The finest of the wampum, and highest in value, was woven into girdles. These girdles were of two sorts. One kind was about a yard in length, with fourteen strings in a row, woven into "black" and white squares, continued obliquely from edge to edge. The other was more complicated, consisting of fifteen strings in a row woven into black diamond-squares and crosses within them, the spaces between being filled with white. When not worn as the richest ornament of the possessor, the girdles were used in large payments or as a treasured present or gift on auspicious occasions.

The CAMP-FIRE

A MEETING-PLACE for READERS, WRITERS and ADVENTURERS

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

DIPPING deep down into our cache I draw out some letters of several years back. Here are some contemporary accounts of Joaquin and Lola Montez:

Philadelphia.

Having accidentally discovered some information that might be of interest to our comrade Hugh Pendexter in connection with his story "Old Misery," I am passing it along for what it is worth.

I have a weakness for old books and especially for old scrap-books of which I have a number.

While reading H. P's. introductory letter to his present story, I had a vague recollection of some clippings concerning Lola Montez and the bandit Joaquin. Upon extensive searching they were located and I am passing them on. This certain scrap-book contains clippings from the *Independent Herald*, West Chester, Pennsylvania, and the *Village Record* of the same place, *Ballou's Pictorial*, Boston, Mass., and others. The dates run from '51 to '56.

THE following concerning Lola Montez is attributed to Bayard Taylor the "Chester County Poet." Whether it is included in his "Views Afoot" (1846, 2 Vol., N. Y.) I do not know as I have not this book at hand, but it strikes me that his European trip was between 1844 and 1846. Still I seem to remember that he was in Germany again in 1850 or '51. The clipping follows (Written for the *Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion*):

"We took the cars to Bonn, and next day ascended the Rhine to Mayence. The river was swollen by the recent rains, but luckily we had a bright and beautiful day. It was the same fair Rhine I had kept in my memory, not so dear, nor to my eyes so grand as our Hudson, but still a noble river and worthy of its fame. Among our passengers was a tall woman of about thirty years of age, who seemed to have no companion. Her face was still beautiful and her air was singularly bold, brilliant and spirited. It was whispered among the passengers that she was no less than Lola Montez. Her resemblance to the portraits of the latter struck me at first glance. She was dressed plainly, but with exquisite taste, and notwithstanding a certain defiance in her manner, seemed rather to shrink from than court observation. Her eyes were large and dark brown, her nose faultless in its pure, straight outline, and her lips small and finely curved. We at once accepted the suspicion, and set her down for Lola Montez. If she it was, I can easily understand how she could bewilder the brain of an old king, but can not believe she will ever take captive one loyal heart.—BAYARD TAYLOR.

THE clipping on Joaquin runs to great length but, if merely for an exposition of the newspaper style of the day, it is interesting. The article is headed by a very ferocious wood-cut of the bandit and is worded in the following manner: "Joaquin—The California Mountain Robber."

"Every citizen in the United States has head of the notorious California mountain robber, Joaquin! In the last few months back the villainies practiced by an organized band of cutthroats, of whom he is chief, has not only excited the horror, but aroused the vengeance of the whole tier of southern counties of California. No effort has been spared to capture him, alive or dead; but with the perfect adroitness of an accomplished scamp, he bids defiance to pursuit, by mounting some one of the numerous fleet steeds at his command, and disappearing almost with the rapidity of the wind. Wherever he goes his hand is stained in human blood. His faithful co-adjutors in crime, imitating the infernal example, slaughter their unoffending victims on all sides, rob their bodies, plunder their houses and camps, and carry off the rich booty to their secret fastnesses among the mountains. Many of them have fallen by the avenging hand of popular justice; but by far the largest number are yet loose in community, preying upon its life and escaping with its substances.

A reward of $1000 for the apprehension of Joaquin, offered by Governor Bigler, was still further increased by the sum of $3000 added to it by the Chinese. He is still at large, however, and rumor says he is at this present time disguised in San Francisco. When suddenly surprised, he boldly faces his enemies, and receives their bullets on his breast, which are glanced or flattened by a coat of steel worn underneath his clothing. While it is conceded that he is personally known to most of the Mexicans along the whole line of his depredations, it is believed that many of them, from antipathy to the Anglo-American race, facilitate his escape when there is danger of his arrest, and hold correspondence with him to direct his purpose, through the medium of members of his atrocious band."

PARTICULARS of Joaquin's life and personal appearance are copied from the San Francisco *Whig*:

"He was born in the Villa de Catorce, department of Jalisco, is aged 35 years, and ranked among the most crafty and dangerous guerrillas of Mexico. Though living in California and heading a band of outlaws, he is also chief of a similar organization at this time in the vicinity of Mexico, with whom he holds regular communication. He has been known to enter the capitol cities disguised as a friar, has been arrested several times, but through the expertness and influence he wielded among the soldiery, has been discharged. He is about six feet in height, and of immense muscular strength; is well versed in the use of arms, and in disposition is cruel and sanguinary. His complexion is dark and sallow, with features of a determined cast and expressive of great fierceness. He has resided at San Francisco, and has frequently obtained information of Mexicans leaving California with money, who have been dogged and robbed by detached portions of his band. In some instances they have been robbed on their arrival at Mexico—the news of their departure and the sums of money they had about them, having been forwarded by means of associates living along the road. Joaquin belonged to the band of guerrillas commanded by the famous Padre Jurata, who was captured and shot during the Mexican War. The Mexicans look upon him as a brave man, and he is considered a person of some education.

"Since the days of Robin Hood and Little John, whose exploits in the forests of Lincolnshire secured them a vagabond title to the distinction of posthumous fame, nothing has been seen or heard outside of Spain and Mexico, equal to the villainies of this singularly successful bandit. All Spanish countries have their guerrillas and their *landrones;* but a feature of this kind precipitated into American communities, and attended with such unparalleled atrocities, without the power of the people to avenge is something astonishingly rare, indeed. That Joaquin receives material aid from his countrymen residing in those countries where his infamies have been most readily practiced, is a question admitting of but little doubt. The superstitious veneration with which the mixed blood of Mexico has ever regarded courage in any of its citizens, leads them to bow to that influence as implicitly as to the religious requirements of a priest. A commingled sentiment of admiration and fear operates upon their minds to produce this result; in addition to which, as the gallantries and prodigality of Mexican robbers is proverbial, they lose nothing by the practise of discretion as they would profit little in making disclosures.

"Joaquin is evidently actuated by baser motives in his career of rapacity and bloodshed than that of mere patriotism, as is pretended by some to be claimed for him. California is not the place of his birth, and he can not, therefore, have any national jealousies because of the occupancy of the country by the Americans. He seems to murder merely for the love of the sport, and to rob because it is a life of excitement requiring great risk in its accomplishment, and yielding large profits when attended by good luck. In this career he may be eminently successful for a short time to come, as he has been for a considerable period of the past; but his career of villainy must be limited.

"The whole country is on the watch for him; and when he least expects it, perhaps, he will be seized upon to expiate his crimes by the ignominious death of the gallows. Avoiding contact with Americans under all circumstances attended with risk, it has been the policy of Joaquin and his associates to prey with particular severity upon the Chinese; frequent thefts are committed in their camps, and where resistance is attempted they are butchered with a heartless cruelty becoming the sanguinary nature of the murderer and outlaw. These people are industrious, economical and timid. When in possession of ordinary diggings, their unremitted labors enable them to accumulate larger profits than any other nation of people; from this cause it is that a descent made upon their undefended camps, by an adroit thief, such as Joaquin, is seldom a bootless hazard."

THE Sacramento papers of the 15th of February contain a long account of an unsuccessful pursuit of this robber, of which the Alto *Californian* makes the following summary:

"On Friday last, the citizens of Jacksonville brought in the dead body of Mr. Lake, a butcher of that place, and the body of a Chinaman, who was wounded by a pistol ball. It was not then known who had committed these outrages. On the next day, Saturday, three Chinamen were killed between Sutter and Jackson, a distance of four miles. The driver of the Stockton stage and two passengers were killed on the same day by Joaquin and two others supposed to be Mexicans. The three men were shot and the horses taken from the stage.

"On the same day, the same parties drove some fifty Chinese from a camp in the neighborhood, and carried away or destroyed their tents. On the Thursday previous, Joaquin rode through the village of San Andres, at a quick gallop, and shot three Americans as he passed through the streets. Joaquin must be one of the best shots with a revolver in this or any other country, as nearly all these men were shot through the neck. The whole band, it is supposed, consists of about sixty men, all of whom are thought to be Mexicans.

"A letter from Jacksonville, dated 13th instant, says: 'The town is under the greatest excitement. A large meeting of the citizens was held this evening at which measures were taken that must lead to the eventual capture of the murderers. Nearly our whole population has volunteered to turn out in pursuit tomorrow. Woe to the Mexicans if they are caught!'

"The party of Americans who started in pursuit, found at Cook's Gulch, on Sutter Creek, the dead body of a Chinaman. They traced the robbers to Jackson Creek, a few miles below this village, and there found more of their work—one Chinaman mortally wounded. Mr. Lake was living, but speechless, and died in a few minutes after the arrival of the Americans. He had been shot twice, and stabbed through the neck and his mule taken."

Now this letter has been rather slow in starting and much slower in getting finished, but I hope it will interest Hugh Pendexter and perhaps others. Kindly pass the word also to Comrade J. W. Brewer, who inquired about Red Cloud, that I have a supposedly authentic copy of his speech in answer to the missionary in 1815, also an account of his last illness and death by an eye witness. Would be glad to send either him or the Camp-Fire a copy of these.—Warren A. McCarus.

* * *

WE HAVE already heard from our comrade X. Y. X. who is one of the officers actively engaged in combatting the drug evil. He is seeing the effects of that evil; most of us only hear about them—about some of them.

The dope problem is a real he-man's problem. The use of narcotics in any form deadens the user morally and mentally. Dope users become criminals readily when their supply is shut off.

LET us take B for an example. B was a mechanic in a garage and an extra good one, too. Then he started hitting the snow. At first it was easy to get, but, as the habit got a firmer hold on him and his "bindle" didn't last as long, it became scarcer—according to his peddler. And the price increased in proportion. Soon it was costing him more than he could pay for out of his salary, so he had to raise the extra amount some other way. Stolen accessories and tools contributed toward keeping him supplied. Then, when he was discovered in the theft of a tire, his employer, because of B's long service with the concern, merely discharged him and didn't have him arrested.

B's salary stopped but his craving for cocaine didn't, and next we hear of him in jail for the theft of an automobile. There you have it in a nut-shell —from an honest mechanic to a thief in a few short months.

Yet B was a man, and should have had intelligence enough not to use it. Yet it is surprising how many people do not know the effects of it.

If our men and women don't know its effect, how can we expect our young people to know enough to leave it alone?

I WOULD like to know the per cent. of crimes committed in New York, Chicago, San Francisco and New Orleans in which the criminals after arrest proved to be narcotic addicts.

Our laws on the control of narcotics are all right but they need teeth put in them. My suggestion would be a uniform narcotic law providing the following penalty:

For the first offense in peddling drugs, two years to ten years with the provision that three-fourths of the sentence must be served before they are eligible for parole, except in the case of addicts who are arrested for peddling. In the latter case, I would suggest that they be confined in a public hospital under medical attention until such time as they are pronounced cured, after which they would be placed on probation for five years. I would suggest that every month they be examined for evidences of addiction by competent medical officers.

For the second offense at peddling, the penalty should be life imprisonment as an habitual criminal. A dope peddler is of no use to humanity. He shows humanity no mercy when he plies his vile trade. Why, therefore, should humanity allow him to run at large to pollute the children and the young people?

For the addict I have every sympathy. Too often the cured addict returns to the use of narcotics again through the hounding and efforts of the peddler. The peddler, if possible, will try to "hang a crooked deal" on the addict so that he dares not turn him in to the police. The addict is to be pitied and helped, but the peddler is to be hated and stamped out.

The laws are all right, but they need fangs.

I realize that this letter is not very clearly written. I don't know whether you think my suggestion for a uniform super-severe narcotic law is too radical or not. But I hate a narcotic peddler with a whole-souled hate and after seeing some of their handiwork, I always boil over again. Count me in on anything I can do to help.—X. Y. X.

Personally, I fail to see anything "too radical" in the above. Quite the contrary. For a first offense in dope peddling by a non-addict ten to twenty years would seem a mild minimum. These dope peddlers are murderers, without any of the justification of many murderers. Why should they be punished more gently?

Let us not forget the other remedy. Educate our boys and girls, in the school as well as the home, so that they can not fall to ruin through ignorance.

Have you talked to your own children in such manner that they have very clear and definite knowledge against the danger that may beset them at any time?

THERE is further testimony tending to prove the authenticity of "A Recruit with Walker," as told by Alfred P. De Shields to J. D. Sweeney, printed in one of our August issues. You will remember that while we believed in its genuineness we did not vouch for it, merely presenting it to you as an interesting narrative and asking your assistance in determining just what value should be assigned to it as an historical document.

The first comrade endorses from direct evidence in original Walker documents in his personal possession and very kindly offers the use of these to any comrade interested:

Newark, New Jersey.

In your issue of August 30th, 1925, editor's comment and Camp-Fire letters cast doubt upon the narrative of "A Recruit With Walker" told to J. D. Sweeney by Alf. P. De Shields who was with General Walker in Nicaragua. Although late with the proof, I would like to put it on record, as there are facts of historical value not known which the De Shields' narrative may uncover.

I KNOW much of the Walker history from first-hand information, as I lived for years with my grandmother, Lizzie Dusenbury, as she was mentioned in despatches etc., and as she left me many stories and documents, records, etc., I dug them out and went through them to see if a De Shields was mentioned. He is.

Among other things on "General Order No. 228, Hdqtrs of the Army, Adjutant Gen'ls Office, Rivas, Dec. 23, 1856" it states:

"Private A. P. De Shields 2nd Rifles is promoted 2nd Lieut. 2nd Rifles and report to Major Lewis.—By Command of William Walker, Gen'l Comdr. in Chief (signed), Ph. R. Thompson, Adjutant General N. A."

Any one interested in this greatest of all filibustering expeditions, or Gray-Eyed Wm. Walker, the Man of Destiny, as they called him, may see and copy from the thirty or more documents I have, some by Walker himself.

THE narrative in your magazine jibes correctly with the many incidents told me by a witness to them and there are many more yet to be told. Only in one detail would I beg to debate with Lieut. De Shields were he alive, and that is as to the character and disposition of Wm. Walker, yes, and his ability. De Shields was very young, less than 19 years old, and knew little of his general. His officers and intimate friends who lived close to him, several of whom, including my grandfather, fought through the Mexican War, spoke of General Walker as a fine character, a good soldier and statesman and one whom they would follow to the ends of the earth. They did, too.

But enough has been said on this. Your article is proven as genuine and I thought you should know.—W. E. DUSENBURY.

P.S.: Some of the interesting happenings mentioned by De Shields in your article are referred to in the Walker papers I have.

THE next letter, from Robert Ernest Cowan, Vice-President of the California Historical Society, not only further establishes Alfred P. De Shields as a member of Walker's expedition but gives us the judgment of one accustomed to the tests to be applied for authenticity in historical research:

San Francisco.

The narrative of one Alfred P. De Shields, "A Recruit with Walker," which appeared in *Adventure*, Aug. 30, 1925, has been read with much interest, and the corresponding notes in the Camp-Fire of that same number have been closely considered.

Certain pertinent questions have arisen with reference to the authenticity of the narrative, its accuracy, and the status of De Shields in connection with Walker's army.

THERE is no valid reason for questioning the authenticity of this narrative. Its history, as given by Mr. Sweeney, is sufficiently conclusive when viewed with the correlated facts. The accuracy of the narrative likewise needs not to be doubted. There may be a finely drawn line between fiction and history, but to those who have had occasion to examine history, this line of demarcation is generally distinct and frequently clearly defined. De Shields has told too much, and his properties are too correct, to be approached entirely by any writer of fiction, howevex graphic or convincing the latter may be. In disposing of these questions, I do admit that although I have read somewhat of Walker's life and carrying on, my opinion after all is merely individual and obscure.

The chief question involved in the Camp-Fire correspondence is that of proof that De Shields was with Walker. He says that he was and that he returned on board the *Roanoke*.

You have published a very interesting letter by Mr. Arthur D. Howden Smith containing his researches. The discrepancies which he notes are not unreasonable, but also they are not serious. Many of us have individual tastes, prejudices, points of view and opinions, and in these characteristics one generation differs from another in but little. Any man who went through and came out of the horrors of Walker's campaign doubtless was of strong mind, and, without severe exercise of imagination by us, his disaffection for Walker may be easily condoned.

MR. SMITH however does include (or perhaps fails to include) one feature of much importance. I quote from his letter which appears also in the Camp-Fire Aug. 30th, 1925:

"On the subject of De Shields, I stopped in yesterday to see my friend ——, the American expert. He had just bought a very rare item, "The Last of the Filibusters," by a Californian who was with W. It had a list of the survivors of the garrison of Rivas who were brought north from Aspinwall in an American war vessel, the *Roanoke*, aboard which De Shields claims he went. A rather hasty scrutiny of the list—which I will repeat next time I go to town—failed to reveal De Shields' name."

I am glad that Mr. Smith says that it was "a rather hasty scrutiny of the list" for indeed it must have been. The pamphlet which he cites is: Stewart, Wm. Frank, "Last of the Filibusters," Sacramento: 1857. 85 pp. 8vo. On page 74, in the list of the Nicaraguans on board the *Roanoke*, is the name of one A. P. De Shield.

That the muster-rolls or any approximation of a complete roster of Walker's army exist is strongly doubtful. While filibustering was a familiar diversion in the fifties, its popularity did not extend to the powers at Washington, and it was even considered to be a somewhat serious form of treason. It is but natural that the publication of such details would have been avoided.

In the case of De Shields, such evidence is unnecessary. The possibilities of coincidence are admitted, but they would have to be too fantastic and too obviously staged to disturb the pretensions of De Shields. He was with Walker in Nicaragua. *Et pars erat.*—ROBERT ERNEST COWAN, Vice-President of the California Historical Society, San Francisco, Cal.

THESE, with the testimony already passed on to you, establish beyond doubt that an Alfred P. De Shields was with Walker. With so many reputable witnesses for our De Shields, the half century or so of his life in California and his unvarying reminiscences of his Nicaraguan experiences and with the internal evidence of his dictated manuscript before us, there is no room for reasonable doubt that the two men were one and the same.

Camp-Fire can congratulate itself on not only bringing to light a manuscript of very decided historical value but also on proving its authenticity. Our thanks once more to Robert Welles Ritchie, to Mr. Sweeney and to each of those who have helped in establishing proof.

FROM Comrade Frank Woody, attorney-at-law in Helena, Montana, came a newspaper clipping on the death of J. A. Talbott, stating he had served with Walker in Nicaragua and, before that, had imported camels to transport U. S. mail across Death Valley on the Yuma—San Diego route.

But it's a part of his letter that I'd like to pass along to you:

Helena, Montana.

By the way, I noticed, not very long ago, that some one seemed to have some doubts regarding W. C. Tuttle's first-hand knowledge of Western life and conditions. I doubt whether Tuttle will remember me but I knew him in 1892-3 when he was a dirty-faced, barefooted kid running around the streets of Stevensville, Montana. His father, Hank Tuttle, was at that time under-sheriff of Ravalli County, while Tom Irvine was sheriff. I was well acquainted with both of them. They had both been U. S. marshals, sheriffs and deputy sheriffs in different parts of Montana for a good many years, W. C. Tuttle being born over in the eastern part of Montana, I think at or near Miles City while that place was in the height of its glory as a cow-town. If any one knows early day Western life you can be sure Tuttle does.

Recently I noticed that Tuttle referred to the fact that his father was not much of a shot with a revolver but was an expert with a rifle. He surely was an expert with a rifle, but he was also an expert with a revolver. There were possibly some men who were better shots with a revolver than Hank Tuttle, among them Tom Irvine, who was the finest revolver shot I have ever seen, still I believe that I can count on the fingers of one hand all revolver shots I have seen who were better shots than old Hank Tuttle.—FRANK WOODY.

I print the above with great pleasure because of the letters that used to come in complaining that W. C. Tuttle didn't know anything at all about the real West he wrote about. Some of the writers had merely not recognized that Mr. Tuttle's stories in those days were written wholly and solely with humorous intent and that farce comedy is not supposed to present a serious and exact picture of real life, but anyhow there were a lot of people doubting Mr. Tuttle's knowledge of his material. As at that time he had never been farther east than Montana, these letters used to make me reflect sadly upon what a hard time authors and editors have. Any one can prove any of us is wrong at any time on any subject and quite a few of them take unholy joy in so doing, often with a perfectly good case, sometimes—as above.

BACK in 1923 I asked Buck Connor, since he and the Indian warrior who formally adopted him as son both seemed to bear the same name, what distinction was made in addressing or speaking of them. Out of our Camp-Fire cache comes his answer. The Lover's Flute he mentions was, I think, explained at Camp-Fire—he relayed it through me to the Smithsonian Institution so that I could have a look at it.

Quartzsite, Arizona.

Since I have gotten my adobe house built, and my windmill a-buzzin', and the slab uh bacon an' a sack uh beans hangin' on a rafter, I will harken back to some questions that I have uprooted from my scrap pile. I will first enclose the acknowledgment of the Lover's Flute by the Smithsonian.

Your question was "How do they distinguish Wagelexa Conka from the white one of the same name?"

My Indian Dad, Wagelexa Conka, has gone to the Happy Hunting Grounds. Old age, a cold Dakota winter, and We-can-tonka (The Great

Spirit) called him to hunt the buffalo in that place beyond the death scaffold. The brave who had painted for the war trail something like forty times; the brave whose name is down in history as one of the half dozen warriors who rode from the Bad Lands (Big Foot's camp) and across the frozen plain fearlessly into Pine Ridge Agency to deliver the Red Man's ultimatum to the U. S. troops, has passed to the ages.

The Brulé Tribe of the Great Six (Sioux) nation crossed themselves in sorrow for the departed braves. The war shield with a mammoth turkey painted in earth paints, and circled with many eagle feathers; the lance with its streamer of eagle feathers, as well as his medicine poke of paint and road-runner bones, now hang from his death scaffold—they all tell to the passing Indians of all tribes that another of their blood has followed the setting sun—Gone West. Wagelexa Conka was not a Chieftain, but a warrior in every sense of the word, whose scars across each breast will ever denote great bravery at the Sun Dance pole.

Wagelexa Conka was just a Red-man, but he was all Red. Wagelexa Conka had a wonderful memory. He it was who could name each trail, mountain and stream from many miles below the Platte to the Canadian boundary. He could take a history robe and read the pictured history therefrom as we can read the daily paper. Two years ago, Wagelexa Conka drew from memory (at the office of Fr. Degnon, head of the Catholic School at Mission, S. D.) the land of his sires, the Dakotas. And when completed, a comparison was made with a U. S. Geographical map. Some of the points were a little bit off, but in the main it was his Dakotas.

There were two Wagelexa Conkas. The aged Warrior, the Camp Orator, the Sioux sage, and the writer. They were distinguished by affixes. How I came to the name follows:

By my adoption Wagelexa Conka desired that his name be given me—he desired his name to pass on, as he was a brave without a squaw. They distinguished between the Red-man and his adopted son in this manner. When they spoke of the Warrior it was: Wagelexa Conka Lakota. When they spoke of the adopted son it was: Wagelexa Conka Wachethala, meaning the white one, myself. Wagelexa Conka died just before Christmas, 1922.

I beg leave to introduce to the Camp-Fire an old-timer, who has condescended to write his knowledge regarding the camels the U. S. Government brought to this country. The man Hijolle (David Tedro, a Greek) died about 15 years ago—but as no record has been kept it is not authentic—and is buried on my homestead. (I have taken a snap-shot of the grave and as soon as I have finished out the film pack I will develop and send print on to you.) The camels imported were in number about 80, and Judge Grossman (Justice of the Peace for this district) mentions that. This was the section in which the Government turned them loose. I had noted mention about the camels in a back issue and thought perhaps this information might aid in clearing up that subject.—Buck Connor.

Very glad to listen to Judge Grossman.

Quartzsite, Arizona.

To the writer it seems as if the wild camel story in Arizona will never end. Once more we are asked about these camels, and in order to refute some of the most exaggerated camel stories we will once more try to explain that the camel's life was very short in Arizona, and that it is extinct today in our State.

THE writer came to Arizona in the early part of 1885 as a newspaper printer, but before coming to the State he had read and heard much about the wild camels of Arizona. After entering the State, we made it our business to find out the real truth about the camels, and while printing on the old Yuma *Sentinel*, we met an old-time ex-freighter, who had hauled ores, provisions, etc., across the desert on the same roads on which these camels had been used as plain work-stock. This old freighter's name was Charles Scott, who had retired and was then operating a small saloon in Yuma, with the soldiers of old Fort Yuma as his best customers.

To this old freighter we put the question:

"Mr. Scott, in what section of this country do these wild camels run?"

The old man took a long look at us and then laughed very loudly and long and turned on us with:

"YOUNG man, there be no wild camels in Arizona, nor tame ones either for that matter, and you can make a bet that the Arizona freighters and Indians are positive of the fact. The whole story is this, young man: Some time between 1850 and 1860 a young tenderfoot connected with our Government conceived the hare-brained idea that camels were the ideal thing to haul freight across these Arizona deserts, that these camels could go longer without water than any other animal and live on the dry brush of the desert. All of which was a very expensive thing to our Government and our Government finally realized it as a fact after it was too late.

"These camels were an endless trouble and the freighters and merchants made up their minds that they must be taken off the highways as common carriers. These camels were finally taken off the roads and turned loose on the desert to exist as best they could. From the day they were taken off the road, it was a constant slaughter. The Indians were very fond of camel flesh and hunted it from water-hole to water-hole. And as to the freighter, he had a right to hate the camel to his dying day, for the camel had proved himself the unlucky devil to the freighter. The Missouri mule, the horse or the oxen, not one of these would pass a string of camels on the highway. A mile away these animals in harness would smell the camels and begin to snort and buck. The freighter would curse a blue streak as long as he had time to do so, for there would come a time when he did not have even time to curse, and that time came when these strings of camels had to pass the mule, horse or ox. The result was a broken wagon, harness torn to small bits and a few badly crippled teamsters and perhaps a few fights with the camel drivers."

The writer put the question: "Charley, where did these camels first come from?"

ANSWER: "Well, our Uncle Sam bought them first in Asia. They were landed at Corpus Christi, Texas, some time before the war between the North and the South. From Texas they were brought to Arizona in charge of a man named Hijolle, a Greek who came over the ocean with them."

"Don't you think there might be a few more of these camels hiding away in Arizona?"

"No, sir, I do not. The last camel I know of in the whole herd came down the Colorado River, toward Yuma, a few years ago. It was an old mother camel with a half-grown colt. They were on the California side. The Yuma Indians, as soon as they heard about it, chased it through the river bottom and finally killed it. But the Indians were not the only ones who killed out this herd of camels. The freighters never allowed one to live whenever they met them. They were determined to destroy them. In fact, the freighter encouraged the Indians in every way to exterminate them, for he looked upon the camel as his mortal enemy!"

SOME twenty-three years ago the writer settled in this Quartzsite section, following mining. Since his sojourn in this place a few years ago he read an article in a Yuma County paper which stated that camels were seen in this Quartzsite section. At the time that article appeared we wrote a letter to the Prescott *Courier* in which we stated that at times a person could, when the morning sun was just right, see a fine mirage, some fifty miles southwest toward the King of Arizona mine, and if a person looked long at this mirage he could very plainly trace out a real Turkish village. And it is also possible that he who saw these camels and reported same from Quartzsite did have several drinks too many and did actually see camels in this Turkish village mirage.

Before our residence in Quartzsite, some 35 or 40 years ago, a well-known old prospector by the name of Bill Baer did have one of these camels. The poor thing was starving and came to Baer's place to save its life. This may sound "fishy" to city people but the wild animal such as elk, etc., will actually walk up to man almost when it is starving for water or food. The writer has at times seen the wild bird enter his camp and drink from the wash basin. When far gone with thirst, at times this famished bird will actually allow you to pick him up in your hands.

AT THE time we wrote the letter to the Prescott *Courier* about the fake camel story around Quartzsite and what became of the camels and their tragic death the article happened to fall under the eyes of an old-time freighter, a native of Texas who commented on our article in the same Prescott paper. This old man was living near Prescott at a small place called Canyon. As near as we can remember his name it was Bob Hackle. This man went on to state that the time our Government landed this herd of camel at Corpus Christi, Texas, the herd was split in half and one half was started for Arizona across country and the other half was kept in Texas to be used for the dry portion of Texas—perhaps between San Antonio and El Paso. And he further stated that the camels that were left in Texas were purloined from Uncle Sam and sneaked over to Mexico when the war broke out between the North and South. It seems that this old man was at that time freighting with oxen between Monterey, Mexico, and Texas points and was unfortunate enough to meet a gang of these humpbacked adoptions of Uncle Sam's on the highway in old Mexico and the result of Bob's oxen and Uncle Sam's camels coming together has made his memory very vivid. At least he stated that it put his ox team in the repair shop for some days.

And they say, among the old-timers, that Lincoln Fowler (better known as Hog Fowler) was unfortunate enough to be moving in the early days a wagon-load of hogs along the highway near Phœnix when a wagon-train of these camels came along. The result was that Fowler's team broke away from him, turned the wagon over, spilled out the hogs and started the first "crop" of wild hogs on the Gila River.

Some years after interviewing old Charley Scott at Yuma the writer met, in Mohave County, Arizona, in the Chimeheuvis Placer diggings, this old Greek, Hijolle, who brought these camels to Arizona and he verified almost everything that Charles Scott had told us about these camels. Some years after this we once more met this Hijolle here in Quartzsite. Later on Mr. Hijolle died here in Quartzsite and is buried one mile west of Quartzsite.—A. G. GROSSMAN.

That ought to settle the American camel question. Our thanks to Judge Grossman.

* * *

MUCH to my surprize there have not been, all told, a dozen letters protesting against my suggestion that we should gain more by forgiving the European debt than by trying to collect it. It was not at all a surprize that there were no letters whatever in endorsement of it, though curiously enough one comrade, who had not seen my suggestion, wrote in suggesting the same thing but on purely economic ground. He, however, was an Australian and of course any representative of one of the debtor peoples, even of a people who long since agreed to meet their debt to us, would be at once hissed off the boards as a prejudiced party by millions of Americans who blandly fail to see that they are equally subject to a charge of prejudice on the opposite side.

The letters that came in merely repeated some of the arguments I had very thoroughly in mind when I wrote what I did. One or two of them charged me with being a rotten American. I'm rather amazed that more of them did not accuse me of being a traitor, in the pay of some foreign government, etc. What, in these days of materialism and money greed, could be more conclusive proof of treason than an expressed willingness to let some dollars get away from the nation which on Fourth of July and during political campaigns boasts loudly of its Lincoln and its Washington and at all other times, as a nation, makes the attainment and possession of dollars its chief goal and ideal?

One of them even attacked me bitterly for saying we are more materialistic than other nations. I hadn't said we were and I don't see that it matters whether we are or not. The question is: Are we materialistic? Allowing for the minority whose ideals are as high as any people in the world can show, I'll say we certainly *are* materialistic. Nor will I waste any time arguing so self-evident a point.

As for my suggestion of forgiving debts—that phrase, "forgiving debts," until this minute the force of it had not impinged upon me. Why, right there is enough to call down upon me vituperative letters and the silence of utter contempt. I'm ashamed to say I had forgotten the words "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." What could irritate more thoroughly, not the atheist materialists but all those materialists who are kept busy deluding themselves that they can be both materialists and Christians at the same time, than those words from the very heart of Christianity?

But I wasn't preaching Christianity when I made my suggestion. On the contrary I was making a bet. And I was doing it on a pretty sporting basis, if I do say so myself. If you bet with me I left you to be judges as well as bettors. Also I agreed that all tests should be applied on the basis of your materialism, not on the basis of my own beliefs.

If you will recollect, I merely bet that, on a wholly materialistic basis, it would be more *practical* in the long run, it would *pay* us better, in dollars and cents as well as in other ways, to forgive those European debts than to try to collect them. The bet still holds.

I should have stated, as I stated on an earlier occasion, that the money should not be given to the governments but to the peoples. Not to be spent on armies and politics, but to be devoted to improving the health, education and general welfare of the people themselves. Either by collecting the debt as a just one on the usual materialistic basis and then investing it for the peoples of those nations, or forgiving it on guaranty of its use for these purposes. Very idealistic, you see.

Anyhow, I'm not arguing. I'm betting. Arguing? I should say not! A man would be a fool to attempt arguing such a course in this age of "Dollars über alles."

But if any dollar-absorbed gentleman tells me I'm a bad American merely because I will not worship the Golden Calf, it's only fair to warn him I'll have to talk back.

A LETTER from deep down in our cache. What has happened to this comrade since he wrote it September 9, 1923, in Corozal Hospital?

Corozal Hopital, Canal Zone.

For a long time I have been a reader of *Adventure*, and in my own small way have had a few incidents in my young life that tend to make me appreciate more fully the trials and hardships of others who are subject to wanderlust.

Sometime in the near future I intend to make a trip into the Kuna Indian territory of Darien, in the eastern end of the Republic of Panama. Many Americans have gone into that territory as far as the friendly Chokois tribes and the "Tame Kuna" tribes would let them, but a very scant few have progressed as far or beyond the headwaters of the Rio Tuisa. The San Blas Indians are also to be reckoned with as one reaches the highlands wherein the sources of the Sabalo, Tuisa, Cucanatchi and many other small rivers are to be found. Much of this country is as yet absolutely virgin soil for the explorer or prospector.

Of course, I shall float a take-down sluice and a shovel behind my canoe. These rivers are all more or less rich in very fine gold dust and not a few prospectors have been seen from time to time hilariously "doing" the cabarets of Colon and Panama City. Usually they treasure and exhibit small nuggets of about the size of one's thumb-nail. Perhaps larger ones have been found there, but I know of none except as I've been told.

Some of you—I'm hoping to meet you at the Camp-Fire, you see—may one day feel the restraint of the home country too confining to forever endure, and with nomadic valor sally out into the world for a fling at travel and search for adventure. In Darien—east of Las Palmas *via* Panama City and Bahia San Miguel—you will find it. If I should one day look down from my screened hut on the Rio Sabalo and see one or more of you coming up the river, you may rest assured that the place is open for your rest and entertainment.

You know, folks, it doesn't take much money to meander about away from home. All it takes is curiosity and the ability to go hungry at times. I was all over Taumalipas State in Mexico some years ago and when I went across the Rio Grande I had nothing—and came out with the same amount plus a lot of experience. Now I can say: "I've been there." *Adios.*—HARRY E. LISCOMBE.

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2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

Please Note: **To avoid using so much needed space each issue for standing matter and to gain more space for the actual meat of "Ask Adventure" the full statement of its various sections and of "Lost Trails" will be given only in alternate issues. In other issues only the bare names of the sections will be given, inquirers to get exact fields covered and names and addresses from full statement in alternate issues. Do *not* write to the magazine, but to the editors of the sections at their home addresses.**

1—3.	**The Sea. In Three Parts**
4—6.	**Islands and Coasts. In Three Parts**
7, 8.	**New Zealand and the South Sea Islands. In Two Parts**
9.	**Australia and Tasmania**
10.	**Malaysia, Sumatra and Java**
11.	**New Guinea**
12, 13.	**Philippine and Hawaiian Islands**
14—18.	**Asia. In Five Parts**
19—26.	**Africa. In Eight Parts**
27, 28.	**Turkey and Asia Minor**
29—35.	**Europe. In Seven Parts**
36—38.	**South America. In Three Parts**
39.	**Central America**
40—42.	**Mexico. In Three Parts**
43—51.	**Canada. In Nine Parts**
52.	**Alaska**
53.	**Baffinland and Greenland**
54—59.	**Western U. S. In Six Parts**
60—64.	**Middle Western U. S. In Five Parts**
65—74.	**Eastern U. S. In Ten Parts**
A.	**Radio**
B.	**Mining and Prospecting**
C.	**Old Songs That Men Have Sung**
D 1—3.	**Weapons, Past and Present. In Three Parts**
E.	**Salt and Fresh Water Fishing**
F, G.	**Forestry in the U. S. and Tropical Forestry**
H—J.	**Aviation, Army and Navy Matters**
K.	**American Anthropology North of Panama Canal**
L.	**First Aid on the Trail**
M.	**Health-Building Outdoors**
N.	**Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada**
O. P.	**Herpetology and Entomology**
	Standing Information

Guns

BARGAINS in rifles, with cartridges thrown in.

Request:—"I have a repeating rifle purchased about twenty years ago at some department-store sale of so-called souvenirs along with about a hundred cartridges for about four dollars.

On the left side of the breech is inscribed:

+

WAFFENFABRIK

BERN

1 8 1 2 8 5

M. 78

Please tell me about it. From the "BERN" I am led to believe it is Swiss and the attachment for a bayonet makes me think it is an army rifle.

Caliber is about .44 and I will be thankful if you will tell me where I can get cartridges to fit it. Is there a cartridge made in this country that I can use or must I use the kind I got with it? They had no mark other than a little +. I have little use for such a gun but I think I could have knocked some geese a few days ago as about a thousand crossed my house flying slow and not over three hundred feet in the air. Had no ammunition though. Maybe I will use it on a bear hunt some time. It will be the candy for that.

Also advise where ammunition for the Springfield 1873 Army rifle can be bought. I have one of them.

I will be glad for any dope you can give me and will thank you in advance."—Ned K. Anthony, Alexandria, La.

Reply, by Mr. Wiggins:—In response to your letter of the 9th inst., I will say that I believe you have a .43 Swiss Vetterli rifle, an old model of Swiss service rifle. I know many thousands were sold by retail stores throughout the country, and I saw them stacked up in store windows in Northern Nebraska a few years since at a price of $3.98 with ten cartridges thrown in free.

If the rifle is one in which a block rises as the bolt opens to the breech of the barrel and which possesses a magazine extending the length of the barrel and under it in the wooden stock being filled through a port on the right side of the rifle, you have a .41 Swiss, and cartridges for it can be obtained from any of the stores handling Winchester or U.M.C. ammunition, in the larger towns. While they may not have it in stock, still the company makes it, and it can be ordered specially. It's not very powerful, but I believe it will do fairly well for a hundred yards or so. Still I'd want something more powerful for deer or bear.

You can use the regular .45-70 black powder loads, of any weight bullet, in the Model 1873 Springfield rifle, but don't try smokeless. Nearly any old Army Goods store, like Kirk or Bannerman, has the stuff by the carload, and it sells very reasonably. I bought some awhile since, and used it in both my Hotchkiss and Springfield rifles, as well as a Sharps, and it was apparently as reliable and hard-kicking as of yore.

Florida

THE great, big thing is—

Request:—"I am a postal clerk and have an opportunity to be transferred to Sarasota, Florida, about forty miles below Tampa Bay. I have always lived in Pennsylvania and Ohio. Would the climate seriously affect me.

Please tell me what you can about climate, hunting and principal industries.

I am single, twenty-four years of age and have been in the service five years. I have had a high-school education, have worked as an electrician and was a member of the Pennsylvania State rifle team last year. Considering that I have a job waiting for me, would you advise me to go?"—A. J. Dormisch, St. Marys, Pa.

Reply, by Mr. Liebe:—Sarasota is regarded one of the best towns in Florida, though, in common with the rest of Florida towns just now, the real estate boom has probably made living expenses very high.

The climate is fine, especially in the winter months, and the summers, at least from a Southerner's viewpoint, are rarely or never oppressively hot. The climate is Florida's great, big thing. The summers are monotonous, at first, because they are so long, but one soon gets accustomed to them.

Sarasota has not much in the way of industries except that fruit and vegetables are grown much in that section; there is some commercial fishing, too; not far away there is some lumbering and phosphate mining. Then there is real estate and catering to winter tourists. Fishing for sport in that section is good, and there is fair hunting a little out of the beaten paths. For another thing, which I nearly forgot to mention, we have great numbers of automobiles in Florida, which means a great many garages and lots of work for mechanics. Lots of building now, which would mean a good deal of work for one kind of electricians, maybe.

Would I advise you to go, under the given conditions? Brother, I never advise anything. But I will say this: if I were in your place, I certainly would go. It seems to me a good chance for you.

New Guinea

GOLD!

Request:—"Having read about the new fields of gold that are being found in New Guinea, around and about the Territory of Papua, I became interested, and since then have tried to obtain some knowledge of this country.

I would be much obliged to you if you could enlighten me on the following subjects: I would like to know how much money a fellow would need in order to buy a prospecting outfit, food and materials for use in the brush; the nature of the land, the attitude of the natives and the disadvantages that must be offset; also if there is a chance to obtain employment for a few months.

If you would be kind enough to answer these enquiries, and also to give your personal opinion upon the subject as to whether or not you think it advisable to undertake the quest of prospecting for gold in New Guinea, I would be exceedingly grateful."—P. Reilley, San Francisco, Calif.

Reply, by Mr. Armit:—Glad to hear from you. This discovery of gold in the Territory of New Guinea, which is *not* the Territory of Papua, is giving me lots of work replying to enquirers.

You probably do not know that New Guinea is the second largest island in the world. It is divided into three sections: the western half is owned by Holland; the northeastern bit is the former colony of German New Guinea which is now a League of Nations Colony *administered by Australia under a Mandate* and known as the Territory of New Guinea. The southeastern section is the Australian *OWNED* Territory of Papua.

Rabaul is the capital of the Territory of New Guinea, distant nine days from Sydney by the Burns Philip Line of Mail Steamers; Port Moresby is the capital of the Territory of Papua, distant eight days from Sydney, Australia. The gold strike is in the Territory of New Guinea about eight days march inland at an altitude of some 5,500 feet. The whole available field is pegged off in leases by the discoverers. If any newcomers wish to mine they will need to discover a new field. I strongly urge you not to worry about New Guinea; I am here on the spot and so are hundreds of other men, but we do not get excited about it. To mine in New Guinea you need at least $5,000 to start off with, for you must engage porters to carry your equipment, etc., over the trackless peaks, and you must be able to purchase everything you and your porters will eat and use for at least six months after you start into the jungles to prospect. If you have plenty of money and want a fine trip through one of the most interesting parts of the world, then come along and you will not be disappointed if you get little gold—though lots of adventures.

Natives are quiet on the Bialolo Goldfield (Ter. of N. G.). Land is mountainous and covered with thick jungle through which tracks must be cut with a heavy knife or tomahawk. Malaria is common all through New Guinea and is of a bad type. Disadvantages are those of a new country plus some. Meagre chances of employment. My policy is to be truthful, hence this discouraging letter.

Lower California

MANY and varied are the queries received concerning Mexico and the advisability of a United States citizen's investing there. Most of the main points brought up in these queries are dealt with in the comprehensive reply printed below. Whether you are thinking of going to Mexico or not, read it. It contains some things worth thinking about.

Request:—"I will appreciate it if you can give me some information regarding Lower California in the Republic of Mexico.

1. What are the approximate locations and prices of grazing land, agricultural land, and wild land, especially near the Pacific coast, both northern and southern parts?

2. Are there any large tracts owned by the Mexican Government, which can be bought, and if so, at what prices?

3. Where will I be able to get the latest large maps of Lower California?

4. What books, if any, will give me information regarding soil, climate, population, history, etc.?

5. It is my assumption that the Spanish language is generally spoken. Is that correct?

6. What is the name of the railroad which crosses the border from California into Lower California, and how far does it extend?

7. Are there any other railroads, if not, what other means of transportation can one find?

There has been some talk in the newspapers in the past few years of colonizing Lower California with Japanese and other nationalities, how far has this gone?"—Wheaton C. Ferris, St. Louis, Mo.

Reply, by Mr. Mahaffey:—According to Article 27 of the new Constitution of Mexico, dating from May 1, 1917, foreigners are prohibited from acquiring title to lands, mines or water rights in a zone 32 miles wide along the seacoasts and 54 miles wide along the land borders. Inside these two zones it was possible to secure title to land by either forming a Mexican Company, called a Company in Collective Name (Compania en Nombre Colectiva), and this also would cover land inside these prohibited zones. As the Company was a Mexican Company it could acquire lands, and mines but the shareholders, none of whom needed to be Mexican citizens, were more or less protected by their home Governments. The other way to buy land was by signing a document in which one renounced all protection of his home Government as far as his real estate holdings were concerned, but which left him with no recourse against any unjust proceedings on the part of anybody, especially the Mexican Government, and with his only protection in the Mexican Courts of Law.

Recently President Calles of Mexico has presented a law to the Mexican Congress which, if passed, obliges 51% of the stockholders of any company owning land inside these two zones to be Mexican citizens and stating that companies owning lands which fall in these zones must be 100% Mexican citizens. That is, no foreigner can even own stock in a company which owns lands which are within 32 miles of the coast or 64 miles from the border, and farther away from the coasts or land borders foreigners can only own 49% of the stock, thus giving Mexicans the absolute control of the concerns. The worst of all this is that an attempt will be made to make this law retroactive, and it will undoubtedly be passed as the motto in Mexico is MEXICO FOR THE MEXICANS.

As all but a very small part of Lower California falls in the 32 mile and 64 mile zones, you can easily see that by no means can you get title to real estate in Lower California, even assuming that lands there were worth having, which they are not, even if you did not have these legal tricks against you.

I understand our State Department will protest against this law. Short of going to war with Mexico, the foreign owners of lands in Mexico will probably get it where Nelly wore the beads.

According to this same famous Article 27, land in Mexico is regarded as a *public utility*, and that the Government can take it away from one man to give it to another. It would take a letter with thirty pages to tell you all the fine legal points, but you can take it from me that no man in his right mind will invest a thin dime in Mexico under present conditions.

This answers your question No. 1. Under no circumstances can you get title passed to you as an *American citizen* of lands in Lower California, even if it were given to you. This also answers your question No. 2.

No. 3. Large scale maps of Lower California are practically non-existent. A good map of the southern part can be bought for two dollars from the American Geographical Society, New York, New York. It is called the Baja California Sheet, Distrito Sur.

No. 4. Send P. O. Money Order for eighty-five cents to Superintendent of Public Documents, Washington, D. C., for the Department of Commerce book called "Mexican West Coast and Lower California." Send seventy cents more for publication of the National Academy of Science, Vol. XVI, memoir 1, called "Lower California and its Natural Resources." This has a very good small scale map of the peninsula, and tells you a great many things about the country.

Two books by North are good. One is called "The Mother of California" and the other is "Camp and Camino in Lower California." Any of your big second-hand book dealers in St. Louis can get them for you. Go to the St. Louis Public Library and get Bancroft's "North Mexican States," or Bancroft's "History of Mexico." The Academy of Sciences publication has a list of published material in it, and from it you can look up a lot of references in the Public Library.

No. 5. Spanish is the official language but many speak English on the border.

No. 6. There are two railroads which run into and out of Lower California. One of them is the San Diego and Arizona, which enters Lower California near Tijuana and out again about forty-five or fifty miles east toward Arizona. The other is a branch of the Southern Pacific which enters Lower California at Pilot Knob, near the Colorado River, and out again at Calexico. Both enter Lower California to get better grades, the S. P. to avoid bad sand hills on the U. S. side of the line. Neither one is of much importance in the development of the peninsula.

No. 7. A railroad running from Mexicali, which is opposite Calexico on the U. S. side of the line, or rather branching off from the S. P. to San Felipe or La Bomba on the Gulf of California is projected and part of it built. This gives communication with the Gulf of California, and the Mexican west coast ports of Guaymas, Mazatlan, etc.

A good automobile road runs from Tijuana, on the line, to Ensenada, on the coast, about ninety-four miles. A good road runs from Mexicali to Ensenada, across the desert and up the mountain range between the Gulf side and the Pacific side, ascending about four thousand feet. A fair road runs from Ensenada to San Quintin, and from there south everything is mule trails. The Academy of Sciences publication gives good descriptions of the roads and trails.

As far as colonization is concerned, Lower California is the GRAVE of more than twenty such schemes and none have ever made a go of it, even under far more favorable conditions than exist at present. The Jap colonization is all a bag of wind; no chance in the world of letting the Japs, or anybody colonize Lower California.

The book "Mexican West Coast and Lower California" describes a colonization scheme in and around Magdalena Bay but they are doomed to failure. Even assuming that they did make a go of it, as soon as signs of prosperity were shown some one or other would likely find some way to oust the colonists and install Mexicans instead. MEXICO FOR THE MEXICANS is, to them, no idle boast, and they mean to make it stick. What the end of it all will be, no man knows.

You may regard me as overly pessimistic but I have very good grounds for any assertions I may make. Following is an official translation of Article 27.

"Only Mexicans by birth or naturalization and Mexican Companies have the right to acquire ownership of lands, waters, or their appurtenances, or to obtain concessions to develop mines, waters or mineral fuels in the Republic of Mexico. The Nation may grant the same right to foreigners, provided they agree before the Department of Foreign Affairs to be considered Mexicans in respect to such property, and accordingly *not to invoke* the protection of their Governments in respect to same, under *penalty of forfeiture* to the Nation of the property so acquired. Within a zone of 100 kilometers (62.13 miles) from the frontiers, and of 50 kilometers (31.06¼ miles) from the seacoasts, no foreigner shall *under any conditions* acquire direct ownership of lands and waters."

Further quotation from this Government publication, "—the national attitude of Mexico towards foreign enterprise seems, at present, definitely unresponsive."

For a good general grounding on Mexico, get the U. S. Gov't Publication "Senate Document No. 285, 66th Congress, 2nd Section." Investigation of Mexican Affairs, published in 1920. This book, cloth bound, costs $3.30 from the Superintendent of Public Documents, Washington, D. C., and is the most interesting book you can get hold of. The St. Louis Public Library may have it. It has 3551 pages, in two volumes.

Great Lakes

ABOUT all there is to know concerning inland navigation, boiled down. Interesting but not nearly so useful as answers to specific questions could have been.

Request:—"I'm taking advantage of the free offer of *Adventure* to ask you for some advisement about the Great Lakes. Please write me about:

1. Navigation, courses, reefs, shoals, lights and charts?

2. Laws and penalties?

Enclosed find self-addressed envelope and stamp."
—Julius Kalus, Cleveland.

Reply, by Mr. Gardener:—On the subjects you ask about, there is material enough to fill several large size books, books which I possess by the way.

A course is the direct track or nearest sailing line from one point or port to another. We have over three hundred standard ones or ones already "mapped out" for us, however should we have to make a trip to some out of the way place, one that is not in the regular trade lanes, we take our charts, parallel rules, dividers and compass and plot out our own course. So you see how difficult it is to answer that question as I am not just positive what you wish to know.

As to reefs and shoals, there are over five hundred of them, all of which are a menace to the navigator. Some are marked and charted and some are not; therefore it is up to the navigator to be constantly on the alert to avoid coming in contact with any one of them as it usually spells disaster to the ship and its cargo, and the navigator must know their exact location, depth, and the direction and distance they extend from a given point. He must plot his courses in such a manner as to give them a wide berth in all weathers under all circumstances.

As to lights, there are nearly a thousand on the Great Lakes, each light having a certain designated characteristic. The navigator must know the peculiarities of each light; *i. e.,* the grouping of the flashes, if any, the color or color combination, the duration of the flash or flashes, and the mean distance the light can be seen from a given point and the distance under stress or otherwise it is safe to approach any given light.

Charts, there is a chart for every port, harbor, bay, sound, river, canal, or lake, any body of water large enough to be navigable. These charts can be had in nearly every language. These charts show the directions, give depths of water, positions of lighthouses, channels, reefs, shoals, islands, rocks. The compass rose showing Variation for the different localities, the meridians and etc. This information is invaluable to the navigator. Should you wish to purchase any charts of the Great Lakes, write to The Great Lakes Survey Office, Detroit, Mich., for their catalogue and you can pick out the charts you wish to have. The price is from twenty to sixty cents each.

The laws and penalties are certain rules and regulations applying to ship-masters, owners, and the ships' personnel, regarding mutiny, distress signals, channel and harbor regulations, speeds at given places, intoxication, negligence of duty, abuse of crew, disobeying orders, Customs regulations, etc.

Navigation as a whole is simply a thorough knowledge of all these things combined with years of experience, hard knocks and a lot of courage and common sense.

This is your answer "boiled down." If you care for any specific information on any of the above subjects, please write me again and I will be glad to render any assistance possible.

Names and addresses of department editors and the exact field covered by each section are given in the next issue of the magazine. Do NOT write to the magazine itself.

British Columbia

ALTHOUGH this inquirer asked a great many questions, he made each one of them specific and consequently enabled the expert to answer them easily and completely. Note that when this was written the section including B. C. had no expert in charge and that Mr. Shaw's thoroughgoing and painstaking reply is an excellent emergency job. The section has since been taken over by Mr. Plowden, whose address will appear in the next issue of the magazine.

Request:—"Will you please be so kind as to answer the following questions?

1. At what would you estimate the cost of a trapping outfit for five months in the Cassiar Mts. of British Columbia?
2. What would be the weight of this outfit?
3. Is this good trapping territory? For what animals?
4. What would be the best way to pack the outfit in from Dease Lake? Could you use a tobboggan sled?
5. How long a trap line would you advise? How would ten miles a day be for two trappers who have not had much experience?
6. Would two cabins about ten miles apart be enough? Then we could run two or three circular lines of traps from each cabin.
7. Are these dimensions all right for the cabins? 10-10-7.
8. What are the best logs to be found in that country to use?
9. How much should the cabin roof slope to afford good drainage?
10. How should you place a cabin as to land drainage, rivers, sanitation, etc.?
11. What is the best way to roof the cabins?
12. What is the best way to build the doors and windows or should there be any windows in the cabins?
13. We plan to go in from Dease Lake with only enough supplies to last until we find a good territory and build the cabins, then we will come out to Dease Lake and take our supplies in by tobboggan. Is this plan any good?
14. Do you have to get a license to trap in that territory? If so where could I get one and how much would it cost?
15. How far into the interior from Dease Lake would we have to go to get virgin territory to trap?
16. Do you think the 30-06 Springfield cut down to a sporting rifle is as good as any gun for trapping, hunting, etc.?
17. What time of the year would you advise going in to build the cabins and locating?
18. Where could I get some good scent formulas?
19. Are the commercial scents as good as the homemade ones?
20. Which commercial scent is the best?
21. What would be a fair fur catch in that region for the trapping season?
22. Can all good supplies be obtained at Telegraph Creek?
23. Wouldn't it be best to take your guns and personal supplies from the States?
24. Are the supplies much higher than in the States?
25. How many traps would I need? What sizes?
26. Where can I obtain more information on British Columbia along the lines I have been asking these questions? Also on trapping in that region? On mining?
27. Could I buy a Springfield sporting rifle in Alaska?
28. Would it be best to take all the supplies from Telegraph?"—James Hare, Norman, Okla.

Reply, by Mr. Victor Shaw:—You've given me quite an order; but I rather like to reply to such even if it does take longer. On most of it, I can fill your bill; but I'll have to generalize on some of it, for one or two questions are a bit beyond my depth. However, I believe I can direct you to dope, in such cases.

1. By five months I take you to mean November to April; but this entails your expense of getting in there, also the time consumed. Think one month should cover getting on suitable ground. I really don't think I'd tackle it myself short of one thousand dollars in my kick. Might squeeze that a bit, of course; but it is good to feel safe and to have a bit over for emergencies.

2. Don't believe your outfit should weigh (all needed for one man) much over one thousand pounds, if that.

3. It sure is good trapping country! All fur bearers indigenous to the sub-arctic and latitude 59 degrees north—interior timbered land.

4. Depends on just where you hit in. Might go down Dease River and then strike back from there. Toboggan would be O. K. if you are "shoe-wise." Back-pack and tump-line, in summer; or hire a pack animal. Think you might get horses at Porter—north end of Dease Lake. Use river boat for much of it—and you might select a locality fairly close to main stream.

5. Ten miles isn't such a whale of a line, but much depends on the topography of particular place. Rough going makes ten miles pretty tough for cheechakos. Better leave that question till you get there; then line out what you can handle, and extend later. See point?

6. I'd say one cabin for two men—two lines from it, one for each—may have over-night shack at other end of each line making two-day trip. That also will work itself out for you.

7. A 10 x 12 x 7 cabin is O. K. for two men—build bunks one above other.

8. Mostly a jack-pine country, with larch and willow—good grass and horses may be taken any where, and have been wintered through on range, in some favorable places.

9. Make your rafters run lengthwise and of logs; then you can have enough support for snow to make low pitch—less than, or about, a third.

10. I'd pick out knoll near a stream, sheltered from north winds by a patch of timber, or at least a high bank. If no knoll handy, dig a good trench all around, for drainage.

11. We generally have a "frow" in the outfit and rive out" shakes". You saw cedar, or pine logs into twenty-inch lengths or even two foot; then quarter and split thin slabs back from heart toward bark so these "shakes", or rough shingles, are about six inches wide. Put on log rafters like the ordinary shingles, with six inches for the lap. If timber is too small or grain is twisted—no can do! Take heavy canvas and paint it—or use rolls of heavy rubboid roofing if you could find it at Porter or Telegraph Creek. Sometimes, we fit poles tightly lengthwise, or split slabs, and then chink cracks and cover heavily with earth and sod.

12. Make doors of slabs split thin—pack in window-panes 10 x 12 inch and set into openings chopped in logs and sealed by thin wood strips nailed with rags for weather strips. Chink whole cabin between logs with moss, rammed tightly with a paddle. Might find you could pack in a half sash. Be sure and take plenty of nails assorted sizes, also some hinges, leather scraps, etc. Rope and cord, also twine in balls.

13. Think that might work out O. K. It is seventy-two miles from T. C. to Dease Lake. It is forty-five miles via Dease River from Porter to McDame Creek, which latter is on way to the Liard River. There is a good auto truck road and trucks make it from T. C. to the Lake in a day, now.

14. Am quite sure you do—but don't know how much. Find out from George A. Clothier, Res. Eng. Prince Rupert, B. C.

15. You are in pretty virgin country at Dease Lake. There have been several mines working lately, but that is an immense region and few in there as yet. The auto road from T. C. to the Lake was only just completed. The rest of the country is wild. It is wild all the way from tide-water at Wrangel, as far as that goes. You'll see some of the best scenery out-doors going up the Stikine River. I'd say that by the time you reach Dease Lake, you'll have a pretty definite idea of the best locality to hit for. Probably that will be to the eastward from the Lake. Maybe down Dease River, or perhaps to the northward from Dease River, up Canyon River, or Cottonwood River. The mountains of both are 4000 to 7000 feet high, bare tops and bushy slopes.

OR YOU might decide to tackle the country to east and south of the Lake. Perhaps this would be best! "Lake House" is at foot (south end) of Dease Lake and about sixty miles from T. C., a trail cuts off to east, a mile and a half before reaching the Lake,—goes over low pass, up Fish Creek, passes south of Fish Lake and then hits north to a lake which is the headwaters of the Eagle River. Gold Pan Creek (scene of last year's gold rush) is about six miles down Eagle River Somewhere around Fish Lake might be excellent ground. Country is some swampy, alternated by low and rolling hills all covered with dense spruce, willow, and aspen. Seems like fine trapping ground, and those creeks certainly have gold sign, too. For that matter, the trapping is no doubt pretty fair along the shores of Dease Lake. The road from T. C. to the Lake follows along the Tanzilla River. There are moose and deer in that section.

16. Your 30-06 Government rifle is O. K.

17. Stikine River opens up about May 15th, and I'd plan to go up on the first boats. Sid Barrington operates and owns them, running from Wrangel (on steamer lines from Seattle) up to Telegraph Creek, the head of river navigation. Fare was $35 —freight about $50 a ton. But by getting most of supplies at T. C. you save duties. Rifle and personal effects are duty-free, I understand.

18. I know of two places, but no doubt most fur dealers can supply them. Chas. Friend, Fur Dealer, Denver, Colo.; or I. Abraham, 213 Main St., St. Louis, Mo. Ask them both also for their Trapper's Guide. The best book I know on furs and trapping, is "FUR TRADERS & FUR ANIMALS," by M. Petersen, Hammond Press, N. Y., price, $3.50.

19. They are made the same way as a rule, but are easier and handier. The age-old rule for scent-baits among trappers is to obtain the secretions from bladder and scent sacks and smear on traps and baits. For fox, wolf, etc., first get an animal in

some way shooting or trapping; then use the contents of the bladder. With beaver, marten, mink, etc., take the secretions from the scent sacks at root of tail—beaver castors, etc.

20. Charles Friend & Co., Denver, Colo.

21. Depends on skill, of course. Two men should get fifty to one hundred marten, and marten are worth $20 each and up according to primeness and size. For other pelts, again it depends on skill, luck, and industry. Should say a good season should net several thousand dollars.

22. Yes.

23. Answered by 17.

24. Not unreasonably so—freight and dealer's profit added.

25. Four to five dozen assorted sizes is probably all you'd be able to care for. You can always piece out with deadfalls, for fur like mink and marten. Friend's "Triple-Clutch" traps are excellent—can't pull out leg. If you take (for yourself alone) 2 doz. of No. 115X—for mink and marten; 2 doz. No. 2 XT, for fox, otter, lynx, fisher, etc.; with a doz. or so of the small No. 0, Triumph or Kangaroo type, you'd have a fair outfit. The 115X sell at $3.20 a doz.—the 2XT sell at $5.61 per doz.; and the small traps at $1.78 and $2.20 per doz. in order named.

Friend has patent fur stretchers—very good—at $2 to $3 a doz.

26. Write to The Hon. William Sloan, Minister of Mines, Victoria, B. C. for booklet called "The Mineral Province of Canada"—also, their new map of Dease Lake Area, issued this year—also, a copy of ANNUAL REPORTS of the MINISTER OF MINES, for year ending Dec. 31st, 1924. All free on request. Latter report contains article on Dease Lake, Gold Pan Creek, etc., on pages 75 to 77. Also has full report on all British Columbianmines, including the Cassiar and Atlin territories. The first named has a list of all gold commissioners, list of various taxes and fees, also summary of B. C. mining laws. There is nothing published about trapping in that section, of which I am informed.

27. You can get one in Ketchikan; possibly in Juneau—am not informed about Wrangel, but you can get them in Seattle. Also ammunition.

28. I have been told that this is by far the wisest method.

IF YOU will write to the Canadian Geological Survey, Ottawa, Canada, and ask them for a copy of their Bulletin dealing with the Yukon Territory, issued I think about 1898 or thereabout, you'll have an accurate detailed and quite voluminous account of all that region around Dease Lake. It was gone over very thoroughly about the time of the Klondike Rush by Government geologists and cartographers, and the report is illustrated by photos. It describes climate, rain and snow fall, flora, fauna, and mineral prospects of the whole country, with good maps. I'd certainly send for one, if they can now be obtained, and they are sent out free.

Hoping that above will fit you out sufficiently, I'll leave you to work out your own problems. I'll say this in closing: that is a wild and rather savage region and a long way from any civilization. Don't attempt entering on insufficient funds, nor unless you are quite sure of your ability to take care of yourself in a country where your life may depend on your knowledge of how to combat nature with success. It is no place for a raw tenderfoot—which you may not be, of course, I'm simply sounding a clear note of warning in time. If you know your stuff, go to it, and you'll have one whale of a time, and if you don't get a load of fur, you may hit it rich on a gold claim. Be sure and take out a free miner's license costing $5.00 annually. Get it T. C. or any Canadian town. It must be renewed each year on June 1st; old license holds till May 31st.

Ask Friend for catalogue of traps, scent prices, also copy of his Trapper's Guide. If you have any chance to talk with old trappers, ask all they will tell about sets. Sets vary a bit up here, also baiting tricks. Keep an open mind and retain all you hear, and read about it. Then apply in practise and keep your eyes open to better them for yourself from your own observation. If quick to observe, you'll get along O. K.

You have my very best wishes for success, and I only wish I were in shape to go along with you. I'll state right here that the Cassiar has been a dream of mine for many years—best mineral prospects, also game and fur. The Mounties keep an eye on you, and like to have you there, so that will help some. They'll always know where you are and how fixed.

Again, good hunting!

Accompany your inquiry with stamped, self-addressed envelop.

Bolivia

A CHEAP and difficult to visualize.

Request:—"I am thinking of going to Santa Cruz, Bolivia, and buy fifty or one hundred acres of good undeveloped agriculture land. Before I go to the Santa Cruz country I would like to get all the information I can about the country within forty or fifty miles from the city of Santa Cruz.

How much per acre does good undeveloped land cost per acre in fifty or one hundred acre tracts? Can land be bought in small tracts in the Santa Cruz district?

What kind of crops can be raised around Santa Cruz?

Is the climate healthful, and pleasant?

Is there any malaria or yellow fever around Santa Cruz?

Is the cost of living as high in the Santa Cruz country as it is here?

Do you think a person could make a good living on fifty or one hundred acres around Santa Cruz?

Do you think $2,500 would be enough to get started on?

I will be very thankful for any information you can give me in regards to the climate, rail, markets, cattle raising, prospecting, hunting and fishing, and are the natives friendly to prospective settlers?

Do you know of any other part of Bolivia that would be better for the prospective settler than the country around Santa Cruz?

What kind of side arms would be best to take to Bolivia and what calibers?"—GEO. SCHNAUFER, Antioch, Calif.

Reply, by Mr. Edgar Young:—It is rather difficult for a man sitting up here in the U. S. to visualize a town and environing country similar to Santa Cruz. A few substantial buildings of adobe, a ramshackle cathedral, a number of frame structures of one story fashioned of hewn timbers and plated with split bamboo or whipped lumber, and thatched huts of poles topped with grass or leaves. It is on the fringe of the world's greatest unknown country, a blob of several hundred thousands of square miles on the map with no boundary fixed between Brazil and Bolivia or Peru, or for that matter Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela or the Guianas.

It is, I will say, thirty-five hundred miles from the mouth of the Amazon on the eastern bank of (if I remember right) the Piray River which is a fair sized river at this place. It is in foothills of the eastern Andes, or to be more specific it is in a detached range of small mountains which rise to something like 3,000 feet high at their summits. Health conditions are good, the outlook for agriculture good due to the fact that almost any crop that will grow in the world will thrive here: corn and bananas, black pepper and beans, yams and turnips, rubber and rutabagoes, manioc and head lettuce, any old thing by sliding up and down the slopes a bit. Cattle and horses do well, hogs and burros, chickens and ducks. In fact there is no region in the world so prolific as this eastern country of Bolivia.

The main objection is that it is so far away from civilization. There are quite a number of people of pure Spanish descent, many civilized Indians, and a German trader or two who live in the town of Santa Cruz. You meet men with a fair attempt of dressing in our fashion although the cloth may be white drill and you meet Indians from the bush almost naked and sometimes absolutely naked but with the bangs nicely cut off square above the eyes. They come in from that wild unknown country which begins fifty miles east and north of Santa Cruz and extends hundreds of miles.

To the east is a vast swamp which would make the Dismal Swamp of Virginia look like a mud puddle. Along the river to the north you will find now and then a small village or canoe port and a thousand miles down the river you will eventually come to the Amazon up which steamers from New York steam two thousand miles to Iquitos, Peru, the head of navigation for large ships.

The department or as we would say the State of Santa Cruz is of great size, something like one of our States and its boundaries are not known on at least two sides, if not three, as there is a discussion between Brazil and some of the other countries about boundaries. It is marked on the map as disputed country and the land is not of sufficient importance at present for a survey to be made, each country having plenty of other wild land in other places to think about.

You ask me how much per acre undeveloped land would be worth fifty miles from Santa Cruz. I am unable to say exactly but I will say that you should be able to get 50 to 100 acres for little of anything within this distance. The matter of acquiring land there is different from here, what land is owned is owned in large grants and you would have to deal with the owner for a small tract but wild government land can be had for the asking in this vicinity.

There is no way of doing it from up here. You must go there and dicker for it on the ground, get in touch with the local government officials and tell them your story, tell them that you want land to live on and to develop and that you are there to stay and the chances are that you will be given at least 80 hectares or around 175 acres for the asking.

The next step is to get up a thatched house and get a few Indians to take up with you. These will be yours. There is a custom of voluntary slavery over there and every white settler or Spaniard and a few of the civilized Indians have a number of Indians that they virtually own and who work for the opportunity of being taken care of by the settler.

Get a few head of cattle and plant a crop, get some large canoes and start sending your products down the river to the Amazon cities and bring back store goods. Quinin bark (red bark), coca (cocaine), yerba matte, manioc, rubber, coffee, corn, hides, dried beef (charque), and other things you can raise and trade for are good trade goods for down the Amazon.

Cost of living in Santa Cruz? You can rent a hut and live in Santa Çruz for three dollars a month and I dare say that you could pay at the most over $30. per month for a room and board at a hotel. There is plenty of game in this vicinity and plenty of fish. With a small farm such as you suggest you could make a good living and also make money. With the amount of money you have you could go over there and look things over, get your land for almost nothing and use the capital to start a trading store or station and make yourself a power in the country. There is also a market back to the west in the mining country Bolivia. There are pack roads over the mountains and a ready market for live stock, horses, meat and farm products. Some little placer gold is brought in for trade by the Indians at all times. The country has been little prospected. The natives in this particular section are friendly to settlers.

Keep your guns below .38 caliber and you will have no trouble getting them into the country. 30-30 Winc. carbine, 22 rifle for small game, 12 gauge shotgun, 32 Special revolver. Take reloading tools, shells, caps, etc., along. A good trade gun to the Indians is a cheap make of single-barrelled shotgun that they prefer. You will find out what other trade goods they prefer after you get over there and you can arrange to get them either across the Andes from the larger cities of Bolivia or up the Amazon from some of the large cities down that way.

"Ask Adventure" service costs you nothing whatever but reply postage and self-addressed envelop.

"ASK ADVENTURE" editors are appointed with extreme care. If you can meet our exacting requirements and qualify as an expert on some topic or territory not now covered, we shall be glad to talk matters over with you. Address JOSEPH COX, *Adventure*, New York.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung

Devoted to outdoor songs, preferably hitherto unprinted—songs of the sea, the lumber-camps, Great Lakes, the West, old canal days, the negro, mountains, the pioneers, etc. Send in what you have or find, so that all may share in them.

Although this department is conducted primarily for the collection and preservation of old songs, the editor will give information about modern ones when he can do so and *IF* all requests are accompanied with self-addressed envelop and reply postage (*NOT* attached). Write to Mr. Gordon direct, *NOT* to the magazine.

Conducted by R. W. GORDON, care of *Adventure*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York City.

JUST one year ago, in the issue of March 10, 1925, I printed two rather odd and interesting versions of the old ballad of "Barbara Allen." A few days ago I received from Mr. S. C. Wheeler of Lofall, Washington, another version learned from his father's singing over sixty years ago.

Mr. Wheeler happened to run across an old copy and immediately wrote in to the department. That is as it should be. It shows that *Adventure* holds an interest long after it has disappeared from the newsstands. During the past year I have received over one hundred and fifty letters from readers in response to issues from six months to two years old.

In a number of instances readers have apologized for delays or have sent in their versions with some hesitation, fearing that they were no longer wanted. Nothing could be farther from the truth. I'm always interested in new versions or in information of any sort concerning the songs that have already been printed or concerning others that I've perhaps never run across.

I wonder if more of you won't follow Mr. Wheeler's example and send in whatever you may know of all the songs that have been printed or requested since the department started. Take a look some evening through the old *Adventures* that you may have lying about and see how much you might have written down and sent in. It's not too late—do it now!

Barbara Allen

(Text of Mr. S. C. Wheeler)

Oh, it fell about Martinmass day
When the green leaves they were falling;
Sir James the Graham of the West Country
Fell in love with Barbara Allen.

"What is thy name, my bonny maid?
And where hast thou thy dwelling?"
She answered him most modestly,
"My name is Barbara Allen."

"Oh, see you not yon seven ships
So bonny as they are sailing?
I'll make you mistress of them all,
My bonny Barbara Allen."

But it fell out upon a day
At the wine as they were drinking,
They tossed their glasses round about
And slighted Barbara Allen.

Oh, she has taken so ill out (o' it?)
That she'll no more look on him,
And for all the letters he could send
She swore she'll never have him.

"Oh, if I had a man, a man,
A man within my dwelling
Who'd write a letter with my blood
And take it to Barbara Allen,

"Desiring her to come here with speed
To the place where I am lying,
To speak one word with her true love,
For I am at the dying."

Oh, his man was off with all his speed
To the place where she was dwelling—
"Oh, here's a letter from my master dear,
Gin ye be Barbara Allen."

Oh, when she looked the letter upon,
With a loud laughter gazed she;
But as she read the letter o'er,
The tears did blind her eyes.

Oh, slowly, slowly rose she up,
And slowly went she to him;
She slightly drew the curtain by—
"Oh yes, young man, I think you're dying."

"Oh, I am sick and very sick,
My heart is at the breaking;
A kiss or two from thy sweet lips
Might keep me from the dying."

"Oh, mind you not, young man," said she,
"When you sat in the tavern,
You made the health go round about
And slighted Barbara Allen?"

Oh, slowly, slowly rose she up,
And slowly, slowly left him;
And, sighing, said she could not stay
Since death and life had left him.

She had not gone one mile from town
When she heard his death-bell knelling;
And every knell that death-bell gave
It was woe to Barbara Allen.

And when she heard that death-bell knell
Her heart was sorely troubled;
But when in the coffin his corpse she viewed
Her sorrows were redoubled.

"Oh, what! hath he died for me?" she said,
"Let all true lovers shun me!
And this I may have said too late,
For death has quite undone me.

"Oh, mother, mother, make my bed,
Oh, make it soft and narrow;
Since my true love has died for me today,
I'll die for him tomorrow."

That's a text I'm mighty glad to be able to print in the department, not only because it is better and more complete than most I have seen, but because it has a number of points of special interest to those who wish to trace the history of the ballad.

REQUESTS continue to come in for songs that I am unable as long as I am away from books and libraries to find. Some of the fragments I am certain that I could complete had I access to my notes and manuscripts; others are tantalizing bits from local songs. Who can give information or complete texts for any of the following songs?

1. A song about a robbery at Union, Missouri, popular in dance halls some twenty years ago. One verse goes:

In looking in the papers you'll read most every day
Of robberies committed and thieves that got away.
One of the boldest of them all—it happened here
of late—
'Twas a burglary in Union, October 28.

Shall we hang them to a lamp-post high
Or burn them at the stake
Or allow a court of judges
To determine their just fate?

2. The story of a murder committed in Texarkana during the nineties, beginning:

Oh, have you heard of —— ————
Who murdered sweet Bessie Moore?
He murdered her darkly in the dead of night
For the diamonds and jewels she wore.

3. A song of the late forties or early fifties at the time of the gold rush to California:

The Sacramento banks are lined,
They credibly inform me,
With metals of the richest kind,
I must see Californee.

So cheer up, my lively lads,
In spite of wind or weather.
Cheer up, my lively lads,
We'll all dig gold together.

ADDRESS all letters R. W. GORDON, care of *Adventure*, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

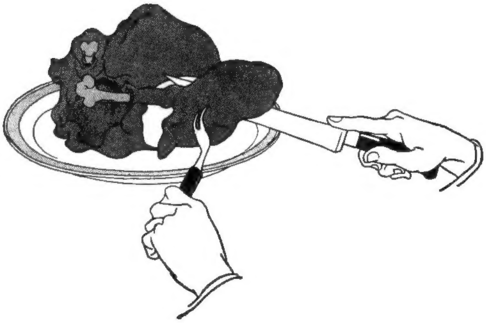
MARCH 20TH ISSUE

Besides the **three complete novelettes** mentioned on the second contents page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

THREADS OF EVIDENCE Tracking was easy for the Indian policeman.	***George Bruce Marquis***
THE ASTRAL BULL Gold and spirits.	***Romaine H. Lowdermilk***
THE JOB An old skipper's pride and courage.	***Captain Dingle***
THUNDERING BEN He carried dynamite in his hip pocket.	***Raymond S. Spears***
LOG CABIN MEN Part III Indians at the stockade gate.	***Hugh Pendexter***
SKY TACTICS Things look different in the air.	***Kenneth Malcolm Murray***
BILGE SALVAGE Scotchmen have a viewpoint all their own.	***Ralph R. Perry***

STILL
FARTHER
AHEAD

THE THREE ISSUES following the next will contain *long stories* by W. C. Tuttle, H. Bedford-Jones, Gordon MacCreagh, T. S. Stribling, Arthur D. Howden Smith, Leonard H. Nason, W. Townend, Thomson Burtis and S. B. H. Hurst; short stories by Bill Adams, Fiswoode Tarleton, Post Sargent, Howard E. Morgan, Nevil Henshaw, Alan LeMay, Percy Charles Chandler, Rolf Bennett, L. Patrick Greene, Walter J. Coburn, Robert Carse and others; stories of adventure in strange places all around the world.



What sort of figure do you cut when you carve?

WHEN a crisp brown turkey or leg of lamb is placed in front of you and you sharpen the edge of your carving-knife—do you know the exact spot at which you should start to cut? Do you know where to insert the fork before you carve? Charles Faissole, maître d'hôtel of the Ambassador Hotel, New York, tells you how to carve poultry, roasts, fish, steak, legs and even roast pig in The New Butterick Cook Book.

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